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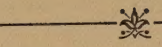

SERMONS FROM REVELATION

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SERMONS FROM REVELATION

CLOVIS G. CHAPPELL

ABINGDON-COKESBURY PRESS
New York • Nashville

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TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE GALLOWAY MEMORIAL METHODIST CHURCH, WHOSE GRACIOUS RESPONSE MADE THE PREACHING OF THESE SERMONS A JOY, THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR.

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I

THE LOST BLESSING

"Blessed is he who reads, and blessed are those who listen to the words of this prophecy and lay to heart what is written in it."

REVELATION 1:3 (WEYMOUTH)

THE BOOK OF REVELATION BEGINS WITH A PRONOUNCEMENT of a twofold blessing, a blessing upon the reader and a blessing upon the hearer who takes its message to heart. But if there is a blessing for those who take this book seriously, it is one that the modern Church has in large measure lost. This is true for the following reasons:

1. The vast majority of professing Christians lose this blessing through neglect. Many of us seldom read any part of the Bible. But even those who read it with constant devotion often leave this particular book severely alone. They treat it as the priest and the Levite treated the man who had fallen among thieves; they pass by on the other side. For this reason, though

intended for a book of openings, it is for many about the most tightly closed book in the Sacred Library.

2. Then a second group miss the promised blessing because they misread and misinterpret the book. There are those with whom Revelation is a great favorite. Some of them are highly intelligent and thoughtful Christians; but certain others, I fear, while genuinely sincere, are often rightly accused of dwelling upon the "lunatic fringe" of religion. Since this great book lends itself by its very nature to fanciful interpretation, it has become a happy hunting ground for those seeking to prove almost every variety of vagary. A certain humorist in suggesting fit topics for conversation recommends as one of the best "What a Whale Has for Breakfast." The obvious advantage of such a topic is that the conversationalist can make any assertion about it that suits him without the slightest danger of being proved at fault. This, I fear, constitutes for some one of the fascinations of this book.

But in spite of widespread neglect, in spite of fanciful interpretation, I am firmly convinced that this book has a message for today. It is especially fitting, I think, that we study it at this trying hour. The red hell of war is now raging all round the world. No one knows what will be the final outcome of this tragic investment in blood and tears. Because of this fierce tempest that has broken upon us, we especially need something to keep alive and to strengthen our faith. I believe that we can find some needed help in this book. This I say

because I am convinced that Revelation is about the most daringly hopeful, the most dauntlessly optimistic book to be found in the New Testament. This is saying a great deal, I know, but I believe a faithful study of the book will convince us of its truth.

I

Why is this book so little read and so often misread?

One reason is the peculiar style in which it is written. Revelation belongs to that type of literature known as apocalyptic. This is a type of prophecy that came into being after the Exile. The great prophets spoke their messages in a straightforward fashion. Any intelligent hearer or reader could understand them. But the apocalyptic prophet spoke to the initiated. Had he used plainness of speech, it would have cost him his life. What to him was more important, it would have cost the lives of his hearers. Therefore, he had to speak in such a fashion that his message could be comprehensible for those for whom it was intended but hidden from those outside. This type of prophet also had a different emphasis. Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah put their emphasis on man's duty to his God and to his brother. The apocalyptic prophet, preaching in times of crisis and danger, put his emphasis on what God was to do for man. This Seer of Patmos, speaking to the Christian Church, sought to speak in a fashion that Christians could understand, while his meaning would

be veiled from others. To this end he proclaimed his message by means of visions and symbols. As another has pointed out, this is a book of pure poetry. It is a book of songs. To interpret it literally is to miss its meaning.

For instance, the numbers used in the book are used in a symbolic rather than a mathematical sense. To the Jews certain numbers had very definite meanings. That is true to some extent with us. We have at least one number that is a symbol. That is thirteen. There are those who do not like to stay in room number thirteen in a hotel. They think it bad luck to sit down at the table with thirteen or to begin any journey on the thirteenth day of the month.

Now the Jews had many such numbers. For instance, three came to symbolize for them the divine. Just how they came to use three with this meaning, we do not know. Possibly they did so through the contemplation of the divinest something they knew—the family. The family was composed of three—the father, the mother, the child. But whatever its background, three came to be a symbol of the divine. Four was also symbolic. To their mind the world was flat with four corners. Four winds blew upon it. Hence, four became the world number. The summing up of heaven and earth is three plus four, which equals seven. Hence, seven came to be the number of perfection. It is the number that is most frequently used by the Seer.

The evil number in the book is six. The evil of six

is that it falls short of seven. This carries out the New Testament idea of sin, which is a missing of the mark. Sin is falling short. "All have sinned," writes Paul, "and come short of the glory of God." Wickedness at its worst was six repeated three times—666. In the man represented by 666, Doctor Jekyll was dead and Hyde alone was left alive.

To symbolize the imperfect, they divided the perfect by two. Seven divided by two equals three and one-half. That is a number of which the author is fond. It does not mean a falling short as six does. It simply means the incomplete. The author uses this expression in varied forms. He speaks of a time and times and a half time, by which he means three and one-half. Again he tells of a certain event that lasts forty-two months, which is three and one-half years. Again he uses twelve hundred sixty days, which again is three and one-half years.

Here, then, is a book whose story is told in visions and symbols. It is best understood by those who bring to it a mind saturated by the Old Testament. One writer asserts that of its 404 verses, 278 are either quoted from or colored by passages in the Old Testament.

II

What was the purpose of this book?

It was written to hearten the Church of that dark and difficult day. Whatever meaning Revelation has

for our time, it certainly had a meaning for the time in which it was written. Indeed this may be asserted of all true prophecy. Every prophet spoke to his own day. His message, therefore, was always timely. Because it was timely, it also as a rule was timeless. Human nature remains unchanged through all the changing years. Even historical situations have a strange way of repeating themselves. We need not be surprised, therefore, when we realize that this message to the Church of the first century has something to say to the Church of the twentieth century.

This book is thought to have been written during the reign of Domitian, who was Emperor of Rome from A.D. 81 to 96. During his reign emperor worship was becoming compulsory. Everybody was expected to do homage to the statue of Caesar. This was a patriotic procedure that had somewhat the same meaning that saluting the flag has with us. Rome was very tolerant in matters of religion. If she conquered a foreign nation, the gods of that nation were brought to Rome, and a temple was built in their honor. Though Rome was willing to defy the nations, she was not willing to defy their gods. The Roman citizen, therefore, or the Roman subject, might worship any god he pleased provided he included Caesar.

But while Rome was tolerant, Christianity was not. These stubborn Christians refused to burn incense to the statue of the emperor. Rome looked upon such rebellious conduct as high treason. For this reason she

set herself to the task of destroying this unreasonable sect. It was, therefore, to nerve these few and scattered Christians to face this persecution that John wrote his book. Compromise was easy. A Christian might offer homage to Caesar and at the same time despise him in his heart, but to the mind of this prophet such compromise would mean disloyalty that might end in utter apostasy. In this hour of terrible crisis, therefore, the Seer of Patmos called the Church to a vigorous faith that would enable its members to be loyal even unto death.

III

How did he seek to accomplish this purpose? He did so by making certain disclosures.

1. There is the disclosure of the Church. John as Christ's spokesman sends seven different messages to seven churches of Asia. He speaks as one who is intimately acquainted with these seven churches. He has perhaps preached in all of them. He knows their membership. He knows their strength and their weakness. He knows something of their achievements in the face of difficulty. He knows the opposition and persecution they have had to meet. Of course there were more than seven churches in Asia, but he uses seven in its symbolic sense. In speaking, therefore, to these seven churches he is speaking to the Church as a whole.

The membership of the Church that he discloses was

few among many. It is estimated that less than one tenth of one per cent of the population of the Roman Empire at this time was Christian. This small membership was without compact organization. Its one bond of union was that of loyalty to the common Lord. It was a Church whose membership was not perfect. We need to bear in mind that neither at that day nor at any other has the Church been perfect. But it was a Church that in spite of the fewness of its numbers, in spite of its imperfections, could be symbolized by a lampstand, even a golden lampstand. It was not light in itself, but because the Risen Christ walked in its midst and held its messengers in his own right hand, it was able to be the light of the world. Thus John discloses the Church with the Risen Christ in the midst.

2. The second disclosure is the foe of the Church. The Church is out to do battle aggressively against evil in all its forms, but evil here becomes concrete. It is incarnate in one great organization—the Roman Empire. This Empire with its capital is given varied names. Rome is called Babylon, the Great Harlot, the Beast. What a fitting name was this latter! The Rome of that day was a beast of prey as has been many another nation since then. And what an enormous Beast it was, viewed in its physical proportions! The Empire at that day was near the zenith of its power. It embraced practically the whole world that John knew. It extended from Scotland on the north to the Sahara Desert on the south, from the Atlantic Ocean on the west to the

Euphrates on the east. It had one hundred million population. The Beast was great in its physical proportions and seemingly unconquerable.

But the opposition that Rome was able to offer through her physical power, great as it was, was less appalling than the opposition growing out of her moral rottenness. The Rome of that time had passed from the higher standards of other days. She was on a swift toboggan toward utter decay. Marriage had fallen into such disrepute that bachelors had to be fined in order to induce them to marry. The marriage tie had become so exceedingly weak that the home had become little better than a wreck. The work of the world was being done by some sixty millions of slaves. The Roman citizen looked upon work with contempt. He was kept in idleness by a dole system that made it exceedingly easy to rot down. Life was for the most part meaningless save as men and women sought thrills through sexual vice and through betting on who should win the chariot races, or who should slaughter his opponent in the gladiatorial contest. Thus the Church faced a rotten and rotting society that was vast in its extent and more appallingly vast in its degradation.

3. The third disclosure of the Seer is the conflict between this weak Church on the one hand and Rome on the other. He never seeks to disguise the fact that there is a conflict. This conflict is a fight in which no quarter will be asked or given. He is sure that Rome will either destroy the Church or the Church will destroy Rome.

It is to be a fight to the death. In thus facing the fact that the Christian life is a battle, he is in harmony both with Christ and with the saints. "Think not," said Jesus, "that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." Of course, the sword of which he speaks was spiritual and not physical. Because the Christian life is a battle, we are to "put on the whole armor of God." We are to "fight the good fight" and thus "lay hold on eternal life." It was Paul's proud boast when he came to the end of the journey that he had "fought a good fight."

This is an emphasis that the modern Church has too nearly lost. We have a tendency to make Christianity too easy. In failing to emphasize the fact that to be a real Christian means a strenuous battle, we have forgotten one of its supreme appeals. I am aware that there is that in us that makes us long to dodge the difficult. But that is not the biggest fact about us. Carlyle was right when he said: "It is not to taste sweet things, but to do true and noble things, and to vindicate ourselves under God's heaven as God-made men and women, it is that after which every son of Adam dimly longs." We cannot here give any details of the fight, but this Seer emphasizes the fact that the Church and the forces of evil, headed by Rome, are in deadly conflict.

4. The fourth disclosure is that of our Great Ally. "I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven." Through this open door, John gets a vision of the

Throne and of the God who sits upon it. Thus he realizes that in spite of all that seems to the contrary, in spite of Roman power and persecution, God still reigns. He sees also that this God who is upon the Throne is a holy God. The word "holy" here is not used in the Old Testament sense of separateness. It is used in its ethical sense. God is holy in that he is perfectly pure and sinless. Being thus holy, he is the eternal foe of all evil, of all sin, of all that can in any wise mar and blight and destroy. He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil." This holy God upon the Throne is the eternal foe of all evil.

Not only is God holy, but he is also omnipotent. He is the Almighty. That is a characteristic of God that I fear does not brace the Church as it braced our fathers. We have a truer conception of his tenderness, but not of his power. We are greatly in need of a new sense of God's almightiness. "Men are like the gods they serve." That being the case, if we have a weak God, we are likely to be weak men. Too many of us wail with the psalmist: "This is my sorrow, that God is not so strong as he used to be." But the God of John's vision is an Almighty God.

The God of John's vision is also a loving and suffering God. The Seer sees in the midst of the Throne a Lamb as if it had been slain. What a word that is! God is not only omnipotent, but is one who is being "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities." He is a Lover. He loves us so genuinely

that he will spare himself no pain to destroy evil and to establish his Kingdom in the earth. John therefore heartens himself as he seeks to hearten others by reminding them that a holy, almighty, suffering, and sacrificial God is upon the Throne.

5. The final disclosure is that of victory. This of all others is the most amazing to one who sees only the seen. John knows something of the weakness of the Church and of the might of Rome. He himself is feeling the grip of her iron hand even now, for he is a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos. But there is no hint of pity either for himself or for the Church. He sings a few dirges, but they are not for the saints nor even for the martyrs; they are for the mighty who have been foolish enough to take the side of evil. Faced by what seem stark impossibilities, he is absolutely sure of victory. He is aware of the fact that this victory will be progressive, but he never doubts that it will be complete and final. He is sure of victory because he is sure of God.

Because he is thus sure, he faces the future unafraid. While others might sob, he sings. While others might give way to wails of despair, he shouts. Listen to him: "The sovereignty of the world now belongs to our Lord and His Christ." Then near the end of the book he reaches a grand climax.

"Alleluia!" he sings, "for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth! Let us be glad and rejoice." What a faith for a day like his! What a faith for a day like ours!

What courage it gave and still gives to those who share it! We can face any danger unafraid if we are thus sure of God and of final victory. And, mark you, his faith was more than justified. He believed that his mighty Lord was going to conquer Rome by destroying it. But God did something far better; he conquered by converting it. He displaced the eagle by the Cross.

What has all this to say to us? We are a part of the Church that John disclosed. His conflict is in large measure ours. His omnipotent Christ is ours also. Therefore his victory may also be our victory. In one of the darkest hours that England ever knew, Churchill nerved his people with these words: "We are now fighting by ourselves alone, but we are not fighting for ourselves alone." We can say something far more heartening. In our spiritual conflict we are not fighting for ourselves alone. We are fighting for better men, for better homes, for a better Church, for a better world, a world where our lads wounded in body and soul may find health and healing when this ghastly war is over. Truly we are not fighting for ourselves alone; and, thank God, we are not fighting by ourselves alone. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Let us therefore go forward in the fellowship of our victorious Lord, in the assurance that he is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all our powers to ask or think.

II

JOHN'S DEBT TO CHRIST

"Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father."

REVELATION 1:5-6 (A.R.V.)

THERE IS A BEAUTIFUL SPONTANEITY ABOUT THIS text. It is as songful and as sparkling as a mountain spring. This man John is not dealing in cold theological formulas. He is telling us out of his own experience something of his measureless debt to Christ. Therefore his story is immensely interesting. In fact, of all the stories there is none that is quite so abidingly gripping as the story of the dealings of the personal Christ with the individual soul. "Here," cries this saint with radiant face, "is something of what I owe to my Lord. Of course this is not the whole story. Eternity will be too short in which to tell it all. But this is a part of it. He has placed in my hands four priceless treasures."

I

First: "He has given me a new sense of personal worth. This he has done by giving me his love." John lived in a day when the individaul did not count. Kings counted; the state counted; but not the individual, not the ordinary man. In this respect John's day was very much like our own. Ours is a day that has tended to a marked degree to dwarf the individual. What is the worth of the individual in Germany, in Italy, in Japan? He is worth naked nothing save as he can minister to the ongoing of the state. The nation counts, but not the individual. How cheap and mean life becomes under such circumstances!

Not only is man dwarfed by the state, but he is in constant danger of being dwarfed by things, by the very bigness of the visible. Years ago, when quite a young man, I remember going for my first visit to South Cheyenne Canyon. I remember pausing under the shadow of the Pillars of Hercules. My first reaction was one of utter insignificance. How many centuries, I thought, are looking down on me from those rugged heights, and how many more will look down upon creatures as frail as I when "I behind the veil have passed"! A certain psalmist felt that same sense of insignificance in the presence of the greatness of the universe of which he was a part. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the Son of man, that thou visitest him?" Yet the

psalmist braced himself with the fact that God was mindful of him, that God did care.

Then, oftentimes we are dwarfed by the multitude. There are so many of us. What does one single individual count among the millions who walk the earth today? What do we count among the vastly greater millions of those who sleep beneath its bosom and of those other far greater millions who are yet hidden in the shadows of the centuries to come? Yet John remembered that the Master does not look simply at the flock, but at the individual sheep. He remembered that when the shepherd missed one, he went out into the wilds and searched until he found it. The Good Shepherd never loses the individual in the crowd. "He calleth his own sheep by name."

Perhaps John also felt dwarfed by a sense of his own unworthiness. Perhaps he had failed and failed again until he had almost despaired of himself. That, I think, is often the mood of any man who takes life seriously. I dare say there are few of us who have not at some time said to ourselves, "In spite of all that my Lord has done for me, I am a failure and always will be." When Mrs. Simpson was on the point of marrying the King of England, the newspapers had some very unkind things to say about her. They told the world how she had already wrecked two marriages. They indicated that she would marry the King whether she loved him or not, for his position and for his wealth. All in all, they made her out a rather cheap

woman. Just what her reactions were to these criticisms we shall perhaps never know. But if she has any sensitiveness at all, I am sure she must have writhed in agony. But of this I am equally sure—when she was feeling unspeakably unworthy, she recovered her self-respect in some measure by talking thus to herself: "Maybe I am as cheap and shoddy as my critics say. But in spite of that this fact remains: the King of the greatest empire on the earth has seen enough in me to be willing to uncrown himself for me." And when John was feeling his own worthlessness to a painful degree, he recovered somewhat by reminding himself of the personal love of Christ.

We need this sense of personal worth today. Many have lost it, and losing it they have lost a great source of power. For everyone who fails by thinking too grandly of himself, I am sure multitudes fail by thinking too meanly of themselves. It was this fine sense of personal worth growing out of the personal love of Christ that was the secret of much of the power of the Puritans. "The very meanest of them," says Macaulay, "was a being to whose fate a mysterious and terrible importance belonged, on whose slightest action the spirits of light and darkness looked with anxious interest. . . . . For his sake empires had risen, and flourished, and decayed. For his sake the Almighty had proclaimed His will by the pen of the Evangelist and the harp of the prophet. . . . . It was for him that the sun had been darkened, that the rock had been rent,

that the dead had risen, that all nature had shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God. Thus the Puritan was made up of two different men: the one all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passion; the other proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself in the dust before his Maker, but he set his foot on the neck of his king." Thus he brought England in a few short years from a third-rate power to the mightiest nation in the world. "He has given me a new sense of personal worth," shouts John proudly.

II

Second: "He has given me a new freedom. He has loosed me from my sin." When Jesus declares, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin," we do not dispute him, but no more do we take him seriously. His declaration seems far removed from our ordinary experiences. When the writer of the Proverbs declares, "He shall be holden with the cords of his sins," we feel that he too is only preaching. When Bunyan pictures his Pilgrim as struggling under the bondage of a heavy burden until he comes within sight of the Cross, where his burden rolls away, we feel that he is speaking in a foreign tongue. We are not greatly afraid of the bondage of our sins. They are such little and respectable sins.

But that sin brings bondage is not theory; it is fact. We have seen men made slaves before our very eyes. I am thinking now of a man magnificent in body and

in mind. He was honored with one of the highest offices in the gift of his fellow citizens. Having arrived, he began to play with drink. He was not the least afraid. He could take it or leave it. He could toy with liquor as a kitten could toy with a mouse. But little by little liquor turned the tables and began to toy with him. I have met him on the street as he was walking in the care of a keeper. He looked like a creature of some ghastly nightmare. He had become a bondslave, and in that slavery he died.

But sin binds us in other fashions, though that slavery is not so obvious. One of the most gripping books of the last century is *The Count of Monte Cristo*. When it was first written, it was said to have cured more invalids than all the physicians of France, because it took their minds off themselves. One of its most thrilling episodes is the escape of the hero, Edmond Dantès. This young man had been unjustly cast into a dungeon. By means of a tunnel he came to know an old man who was shut in a neighboring dungeon. This old man told Edmond Dantès of great wealth that was hidden on the Island of Monte Cristo. One day the old man died. His body was put in a sack to be thrown over a cliff into the sea. But Edmond Dantès managed to drag the body into his own dungeon, and to substitute himself. By and by he was cast into the sea and thus made his escape. But his freedom was only partial. He remained a bondslave of his hate. He spent the remainder of his days using the great wealth

that he had found in tracking down, one by one, his victims—the men who had been responsible for his imprisonment. He hung upon their steps like a terrible bloodhound. It is awful to be the victim of a hate like that. But it is far more awful to be the possessor of such a hate.

Jesus was speaking sober truth, therefore, when he said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." We become the slaves of habit. It has been well said that it is easier to find a man who has never sinned than to find one who has never committed the same sin twice. We become the slaves of guilt. We become—most common of all—the slaves of ourselves. It is slavery to self that lies back of almost all the slavery in the world today. Despots, having become slaves to themselves, seek to enslave the world. "Jesus found me a slave," writes John, "and he set me free." "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

III

The third treasure that Jesus had put into John's hands was citizenship in the Kingdom of God. "He found me," says John, "a man without a country. He found me a masterless man. He conferred on me citizenship." To be a Roman citizen in that day was a privilege, one that John doubtless did not possess. But he had received an infinitely more priceless gift at the hands of his Lord. He had been made a citizen of the Kingdom. He had been brought into right rela-

tionship with his Lord. He had found a Master. He had found One great enough and lovable enough to take captive his whole heart. No man comes to his best until he finds such a Master.

This citizenship had brought John into right relationship not only with his Lord, but with his fellow saints. He no longer had to walk alone. He saw in every man a fellow citizen, a brother for whom Christ died. He had become a part of a great whole, a citizen of a great commonwealth. He was a member of that group who were no longer, as Paul puts it, "strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God." "He found me a man without a country, and gave me citizenship and fellow patriots with whom to live and love."

With this new citizenship had come also a new security. John was a Jew. He had belonged to a weak nation that for its weakness had paid a terrible penalty. We have fully realized in our own day the peril of weakness. How many small nations have been trodden into the mud in recent days whose one crime was that of weakness! It is a great privilege in these desperate times to be a citizen of a nation strong enough to withstand the forces of evil that seek to destroy it. It was to a mighty Kingdom that John belonged. "He has made me a citizen," he said proudly, "of a Kingdom that cannot be shaken."

IV

Finally: "He has given me a position of highest usefulness. He has given me the privilege of working at a task that is infinitely worth while. He has made me a priest." In so saying, John is not referring to the fact that he has been called into the ministry. This priesthood that he finds so thrilling is not for the few, but for the many. It is not for one distinguished Christian here and there; it is for every Christian. John believed in what we are accustomed to call the universal priesthood of believers. Every Christian is a priest unto God. What are some of the privileges of priesthood?

A priest has the right of access to God. "He has given me an open door into his presence," declares John with radiant face. "I can go to him for myself. I can tell him of all my needs, my failures, my follies, my heart-hunger. I can enter into his fellowship. Thus he supplies all my needs according to his riches in glory. Not only does he give me the right of approach to himself, but through this approach he gives me the privilege of being a channel through which his amazing love and mercy may flow to others. Having gone into his presence, I am enabled so to live that those who know me best take knowledge of me that I have been with Jesus." Here, I take it, is the greatest service that one man can render to another. What can you do for your brother, what can you do for your child that will enrich him beyond all other treasures that you can put

into his hands? Answer: you can bring to him a sense of God. There is nothing that one man can do for another that is better than that.

"He has made me a priest unto his God and Father." That is the answer to the highest longing of the human heart. It satisfies our hunger for God and our hunger for service. It is what Jesus meant when, on that last great day of the Feast, he said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, ... out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water." "He has given me the right to drink of the water of life freely," said John. "Not only so, but he has also made it possible that I shall give life, that by my very presence I shall break up the desert of the heart and set the fields of the soul to flowering."

V

Now since Jesus has done all this for John, and since these are treasures for which every one of us naturally longs, we therefore turn our wistful faces toward this Seer and ask him this big question: How did you arrive? How was it that Christ was able to do this for you? In answer to this question John leads us up a hill called Golgotha and makes us to stand once more under the shadow of the Cross. Just what his theory of the atonement is, I do not know. But of this I am sure: he was certain that these treasures came to him from the hand of Christ at the price of life laid down. Jesus had set him free by his blood. The gifts that he had

put into John's hands were not cheap gifts. They had come at the price of the Cross.

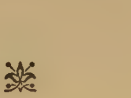
And the Seer himself—what was his part? His part was to receive. That is your part and mine. That same winsome Christ is here today. He is bending wistfully toward you and me. He speaks to us as he spoke in the long ago: "This is my body; this is my very self. It is given for you." All we have to do is to receive him. But we receive him only by the giving of ourselves. Could there be a worse tragedy in time or in eternity than this—for us to count the treasures that Jesus was willing to die for as too worthless for our receiving? John received. Therefore, he sang, "Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father." May his song be ours also.

III

VICTORY OVER CIRCUMSTANCES

"I John, your brother, and a sharer with you in the sorrows and Kingdom and patient endurance of Jesus, found myself in the island of Patmos, for my loyalty to the Word of God and the truth told us by Jesus."

REVELATION 1:9 (WEYMOUTH)



THE TEXT IS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL; THE AUTHOR IS introducing himself. He says little to satisfy our curiosity. Had we been telling about ourselves, we perhaps would have hidden away the essential under the rubbish of the nonessential. But this author sticks to fundamentals. He does not tell us anything of his background. He gives us no information as to his family tree. He does not even indicate what position he holds in the infant Church. Is he John the Beloved Apostle? Or is he some other John? Nobody knows. He himself does not see fit to tell us. He is so busy dealing with matters that are primary that he

forgets the secondary. But he does tell us the facts that he considers fundamental.

1. He tells us that he is a Christian. He is a disciple of our Lord. He is beautifully humble in making this assertion. He lays no claim to leadership, no claim to superiority. He does not tell us that he is a poet or a prophet, a bit of a genius. But he does say, "I John, your brother." He belongs to the brotherhood. He is a part of that Kingdom that Jesus had come to establish upon the earth. He is in the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Kingdom of Heaven is in his own heart.

2. Having become a follower of Jesus, he has come to share in the privileges of those who follow him. He has come to be partaker of the Divine Nature. He has come to share in some measure in the characteristics of his Lord. He has come to share in the patience of Jesus. Patience here is a rich word. It looks in two directions. It means power to endure, power to suffer. Jesus possessed this kind of patience to a superlative degree. But patience means also the power to wait for a hoped-for good. How patient was Jesus with his blundering followers! How patient with his Church! How patient he has been with you and me! Truly, "a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench." And John claims that he has come as a son of the Kingdom to share in the patience of Jesus.

3. Entering into the privilege of discipleship, he has also entered into its responsibilities. Sharing the vic-

tory of Jesus in his own personal life, he has also entered into the fellowship of his suffering. Not only does he share in the sufferings of his Lord, but he shares in the sufferings of his fellow Christians. He has been so loyal to his Master that his religion has got him into trouble. Vital Christianity has had a way of doing that through the centuries. If we are sailing over seas that are always glassy, if we are never buffeted by any rude winds of opposition, it is wise for us to look well to our chart and compass, because the chances are that we are headed for a wrong port. John's Christianity has got him into trouble.

I

What was the nature of this trouble? He had been arrested and thrust away upon the Isle of Patmos. This small and barren island in the Aegean Sea was a penal colony, a kind of concentration camp. Perhaps it was even more trying than most of the concentration camps of our day. Here John was shut away from all those outward supports that had strengthened him in other days. He was shut away from the companionship of Christian friends. He was shut away from the privileges of worship with fellow saints. He was shut away from the fine privilege of preaching to a devoted congregation.

Not only was he shut away from all that he loved the best, but he was shut in with those whose fellowhip was least appealing. His companionship on this barren

island was a criminal companionship. About him were bits of the broken human crockery of the Roman Empire. The atmosphere in which he moved, I dare say, was one chilled by misunderstanding and positive antagonism. John could never forget that the sea was a prison wall which shut him in with those he loved the least and shut him away from those he loved the best. When he thought of the New Age to which he looked forward, he pictured it as one no longer marred by sundering seas. So he wrote, "There was no more sea."

Naturally there is that about this experience of John in Patmos that is unique. But there is also that which is not unique. Life is constantly bringing us into some kind of Patmos. That is, it is bringing us into circumstances, good or bad, that try our souls. Patmos for John was a place of pain. It may be so for you. Some of you are passing through deep waters at this moment. But for others Patmos is a place of prosperity. There are those who are tested by having too little, but there are also those who are tested by having too much. There is a "pestilence that walketh in darkness," but there is also a "destruction that wasteth at noonday." While we are accustomed to put our chief emphasis upon the "pestilence that walketh in darkness," I am confident that the "destruction that wasteth at noonday" is the more deadly of the two.

II

How did John react to his trying experience? This is the most important question we can ask about John. It is the most important question that we can ask about ourselves. Our circumstances—whether favorable or unfavorable—may be vastly important. But the matter of supreme importance for us is not how bad or how good they are, rather our reaction to them. How, I repeat, did John react to Patmos?

1. He refused to let Patmos master him. He refused to surrender to Patmos. This also we may do, whether our Patmos be bad or good. There are varied ways in which we allow ourselves to be defeated by our circumstances.

a) When we find ourselves in a trying situation, we may give way to self-pity. John might have told himself, "I have tried to live right. I have tried to do my duty the best I could. I have stood for my Lord when it cost me my popularity, when it cost me my freedom. But though I have not let Christ down, it seems that he has let me down. Why should this happen to me?" Thus he might have given over the fight. Thus he might have spent the remainder of his days pitying himself and telling how little life had brought him in spite of all the brave work he once did.

Sometime ago I came to know a good woman with whom life had dealt a bit harshly. She had known sorrow and bereavement. She had buried those that were dearest to her. But the most tragic fact about

her was that she enjoyed bad health. I am confident that if she had waked in the morning as strong as a successful pugilist she would never have found it out. Now and then I would overhear her pouring out her troubles to a friend. She would close by saying tearfully, "I hope you will never have to suffer as I have suffered." This she would say at times when the sufferings of the one whom she was making a pincushion had been as sunlight to starlight in comparison with her own. The Patmos of pain makes some people surrender to self-pity.

If it happens that our Patmos is one of prosperity, we may suffer a defeat that is equally tragic. Instead of giving way to self-pity, we may give way to self-conceit. This is sometimes the bane of successful people. It especially dogs the steps of those who have met easy success or who have been enriched through no merit of their own. It would seem that the less we are responsible for our good fortune, the more we tend to become conceited over it.

Here, for instance, is a young fellow, Jack Horner by name. He is enjoying a delicious piece of Christmas pie. It is a plum pie. But little Jack did not cultivate the plums. He did not gather them. He did not cook them. He did not bake the pie. But when he reaches in his thumb and pulls out a plum, he does not say, "How kindly our cook is? How gracious is my mother! How devoted is my father! How good is God!" He says rather, "What a great boy am I!"

This in spite of the fact that the sole contribution he has made to the pie is the eating of it!

b) Then John might have surrendered to this trying situation through discouragement. Rome was so strong; the Church was so weak. He had tried to be faithful, but all it had brought him was a term in a penal colony. Why keep on? Why continue to fling himself against stark impossibilities? Would not the wiser course be to accept the inevitable and go on to the end of the journey neither out-and-out for the Christ nor out-and-out against him? Would it not be wiser to become a neutral? What could John accomplish in such a day, even if he fought at his best?

This is a mood that is very prevalent in these trying times. With the whole world on fire, how futile seems the effort of any one individual to put out the flames! Again and again we are urged to take the war seriously. Sometimes we feel like shouting back, "I am taking it seriously. So what?" But if this is true of the war effort, it is even more true of the effort to bring about that good day when the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ. There seems so little that we can do about it. Because we feel that we cannot do much about it, some of us refuse to do anything about it. That is a fatal surrender which is especially threatening today.

But if difficult days cause some of us to faint, prosperous days can be no less tragic. If there are those who become so discouraged in dark days that they

feel that not even God can help, there are also those who grow so foolishly optimistic in prosperous days that they feel that they no longer need God's help. That was very largely our attitude before the outbreak of the First World War. We had convinced ourselves that we had made such marvelous progress in the realms of science and of commerce that war was simply ruled out. We had reached the place where progress was so nearly inevitable that we no longer had any real need of God. We were able to win by our own strength. We read in the Book of Deuteronomy this striking sentence: "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked." How human that is! We have all seen that happen. I am thinking now of some who were of beautiful simplicity and usefulness until success was dumped into their laps. Then they became self-sufficient and forgetful of God.

When was it that David, the man after God's own heart, became an adulterer and then a murderer? It was not when he was an obscure shepherd lad. It was not during those distressing days when he was being hunted for his life. It was not during those days when he was battling to make himself firm upon the throne of Israel. His fall came when he had arrived. The destruction that stained his life with blood and shame was the "destruction that wasteth at noonday." Like another of Israel's kings, he was mightily helped until he was strong. But it was in the day of his strength that he became supremely weak. A Patmos of pain may so depress us that we feel not even God

can help. A Patmos of prosperity can so fill us with false optimism that we feel we can get on without God.

c) Then some of us surrender to harsh circumstances by becoming sour and bitter. Our dreams fail to come true. We do not capture the prizes upon which we set our hearts. Therefore we get a grudge against life. From this tragedy not even Christian ministers are exempt. Years ago I knew a charming and gifted young minister who was exceedingly popular. He was unusually boyish in appearance. This youthfulness gave him a peculiar charm, especially for his seniors. In addition, he was a born preacher. Naturally everybody prophesied great things for him. But when I met him again in later years, he was sadly changed. The radiance had gone out of his skies. Fretfulness and peevishness had crept into his voice. He felt that his brethren, that the bishops, that God himself had given him a raw deal. "I never got the breaks," he said bitterly. Thus he had become about the most pathetic character one can meet—a soured minister.

But if there are those who are soured and embittered by adversity, there are also those who are made hard and arrogant by success. Men of this type have no patience with those who fail to get on. They feel that all men might succeed as they have if they were only willing to work. Such men are often strong as rock, but they are not like the "shadow of a great rock in a weary land." They are rather like the hidden reef against which good ships often wound and batter

themselves even unto death. This hardness too is a kind of surrender that may blight the best of us.

A few years ago a certain successful minister whom his church had greatly honored was speaking before a conference of brother ministers. It so happened that I had the privilege of being on the same program. When the service was over, those ministers were kind enough to come forward and express to us their appreciation. Their kindness warmed my heart. But such did not seem to be the case with my friend. As we left the meeting, he remarked rather loftily, "They came up and pawed over me." How disappointing! I may be misjudging him, but he made me fear that he felt between himself and his ordinary brethren a great gulf fixed. To allow success to do that to us is to allow it to become a damning failure. Thus we may surrender to our circumstances by becoming flabby with self-pity or inflated by self-conceit. We may become too discouraged to believe in God or too blindly optimistic to need him. We may become bitter and harsh through disappointment or hard and contemptuous through success. All of these spell defeat.

2. But John did far more than refuse to be mastered by circumstances; he mastered *them*. He did not simply endure his hard situation; he used it. He did not merely make a brave defense; he made a victorious attack. It was out of the prison experience that this great poem was born. Through his suffering he became a better man. Through his suffering he

found a new experience of God. Through his suffering he found a new usefulness. This has also been the experience of countless thousands. So often has this been the case that when we think of the people who have helped us most, who have brought to us the largest enrichment, we generally realize that they are people who have had their hearts broken and who have learned their finest lessons in Gethsemane.

Here, for instance, is a tinker, named John Bunyan. For twelve long years he was shut up in Bedford jail. That is, his body was there, but the tinker himself was out conducting pilgrims to Mount Zion. He has continued in his great adventure through the centuries that have passed since then. He will doubtless continue his thrilling work as long as literature lives. Here is another man, named Goldsmith. He was eager to become physician to a certain ship, but his hopes let him down. The coveted place was given to another. But, robbed of the privilege of dispensing pills, he dispensed poetry. His loss was changed into gain.

If we can do this with our failures, we can also do it with our successes. And, mark you, victory over triumph is often even greater than victory over tragedy. We praise the man who works his way up from poverty, and we are right in so doing. But even greater praise is often due the man who has won in spite of the fact that he was born with a golden spoon in his mouth. It was my privilege to be reared on a backwoods farm. Nothing grew of itself on that farm

except weeds, shoestrings, and sassafras sprouts. To make a living there was not easy. For this very reason I had privileges that many a son of good fortune has missed. Though I have since had the opportunity of attending some of the best institutions of learning in America, I have an idea that the course of training that helped me most was the one I had on the farm. It is quite common for Easy Street to end in Rotten Row, but it can be made to end on the Broad Street of character and service.

III

How was it that John mastered and used his circumstances? He did not do so by merely clenching his fists and squaring his jaw. No more did he do so by sitting down and letting things take their course. He did not do it all himself; no more did God do it all. John won by co-operating with God. "I found myself in Patmos," he declares. To be in Patmos is to be in a dangerous place. But it was an open door to a larger life for John. Why? "I found myself in Patmos. I was in the Spirit." Amid his trials he drew closer to his Lord. And the Lord in whom he trusted brought victory out of defeat.

"We know," declares Paul, "that all things work together for good to them that love God." In thinking of these "all things" we usually confine our attention to those tragic experiences, those searing sorrows, against which we must at times press our bleeding

hearts. Thank God these are included! But if the sad things can be made to work for our good, so also may the glad things. If the things that make for tears can bring us good, so also may those things that make for laughter. If we can find enrichment in the "pestilence that walketh by night," we can also find enrichment in overcoming the destruction that threatens to waste at noonday. Whatever, therefore, may be the nature of our Patmos, if we meet it in the Spirit, then nothing but victory can be ours.

There is no Patmos more testing than that of money. Often in visiting varied cities I have had friends to show me over the town. Again and again they have said as we passed some palatial home, "You see that lovely place? The richest man in our church lives there." To this I have one standard reply. It is a question: "Is he any account?" The usual answer is, "He was before he made his money." But riches may be a pathway to richness of life. In a certain mid-western state there lived a man who prospered financially, but as he prospered he gave. When John R. Mott returned from a world-wide tour during which he had visited fifty-eight countries, he declared that in every one of these countries there was some man or some institution proving humanly helpful that had been supported wholly or in part by the generosity of this millionaire. Poverty may become a road to spiritual plenty, but wealth consecrated to God may bring even greater wealth both to its possessor and to his fellows.

IV

HEALING HANDS

A Message to Physicians and Nurses

"But He laid His hand upon me and said, 'Do not be afraid.'"

REVELATION 1:17 (WEYMOUTH)

JOHN HAS JUST BEEN PROSTRATED BY AN OVERpowering vision of the Risen Christ. This description of our Lord is, of course, not to be taken literally. Every descriptive word is used in a symbolic sense. The hair white as wool that John saw symbolizes age and purity. This Son of Man is as old as eternity and as pure as God. His eyes of flaming fire symbolize his infinite power to see and his perfect understanding. His feet of burnished bronze denote that he is irresistible in his ongoing. This whole picture is of One who is eternal, who has conquered death, who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is the picture of One who has the keys.

Keys are the symbol of authority. This Risen Christ is a Christ of infinite authority and power.

John needed this vision of a Christ infinite in power and might. He was in the midst of dangers with which he felt that no power less than infinite could cope. But it is not surprising that his immediate reaction to this vision of Christ was that he fell at his feet as if dead. The Christ here pictured seems to have little in common with the winsome and radiant and approachable Christ that we meet on the pages of the Gospels. He seems vastly different even from the Risen Christ who walked and talked in such intimate fashion with those two friends who were making their sad way back to Emmaus on the first Easter Sunday. Here he is so majestic and awful that John must needs fall at his feet as if dead. Then follows this gracious word: "But He laid His hand upon me and said, 'Do not be afraid.'" How personal, how intimate, how bracing! Here is all the tenderness of the Christ of the Gospels plus the very might of God. The touch of the hand of the Risen Christ was needed to give John courage for the battle that was ahead.

I

"He laid His hand upon me." That is a highly significant word. It is the hand that gives expression to our visions and dreams. It is through the hand that we must translate our dreams into reality. It is said that when Heine returned one day from viewing the

statue of Venus de Milo, he burst into tears, saying, "She has no hands!" That is, she is beautiful, but impotent. In the first chapter of his book, Ezekiel describes some amazing "living creatures." He tells us of their wings. Wings here are used in a symbolic sense. They signify the power to fly, to soar above the mists that obscure our vision. They signify the power to see. But realizing that mere seeing is not enough, he tells further that they had the hands of a man under their wings. Not only could they see visions and dream dreams, but they could translate those dreams into realities.

That is what the servants of mankind have done through the centuries. The Wright brothers had a vision of a machine heavier than air that could fly. But the vision was not enough. They had to use their hands to make it real. Beethoven heard wonderful music in the deeps of his soul, but it was with his hand that he made that music available for us. The artist Turner saw the sunset with eyes far clearer than ours, but his vision would have done nothing for us if his hand had not splashed that vision upon the canvas. An ancient poet, who had perhaps been a shepherd, thought upon Gods' gracious dealing with his life until a song was born in his heart. But that song might have died with him if he had not recorded it with his hand. Because he translated it with his hand, the Shepherd's Psalm has enriched countless millions.

Then it is through the hand that we translate our good will into good deeds. Of course, the good will is highly important; in fact, it is of supreme importance. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." Nothing arrives in its fullest sense that is not motivated by good will. This is true both in the sight of men and of God.

But good will alone is not enough. We must translate that good will into good deeds. Of course, there are times when we cannot do this in an adequate fashion. David at his best was a great lover of God. I am confident that the supreme passion of his life was to build a temple to God's glory. This great dream he was forbidden to realize. He had to leave that cherished hope to other hands. But his longing did not go for nothing. God said to him, "Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart." That means that God does not judge us by the poor dross of our achievements, but by the fine gold of our longings. He does not judge us merely by what is in our hands,

but by what is in our hearts. "'Tis not what man Does which exalts him," says Browning, "but what man Would do!" God takes the motive for the deed. That is very encouraging. That means that if we have right motives in our hearts nothing can defeat us. We can be victorious even when in the eyes of men we fail.

But in view of this, we are not to content ourselves with merely being well-wishers. We are to remember always that what we have in our hearts is measured at least in some fashion by what we do with our hands. We can believe in the fine stuff that was in David's heart because, though he discovered that he could never build the Temple, he did not lose interest in it. In spite of the fact that the Temple was not to be his, he went as far as he could toward building it.

Jesus told the story of a certain luckless chap who, having been robbed and wounded, was left to die by the roadside. Two very decent and respectable men passed that way and saw the dying man and did nothing about it. Why was this the case? Had you asked these two cultured and religious men for their reasons, they would doubtless have had some good ones. They would have told you that they had no skill at surgery. They would have told you that even had they been skillful they had no cloth for bandages. They might have reminded you, further, that to have stopped and helped the man would have been dangerous. But the real reason they did not help was one

that they would never have given. Neither man would have looked you in the eye and said frankly, "I did not help because I was not interested. I told myself I was sorry. I even tried to pray for the poor fellow, but I did nothing simply because I did not care."

But when a certain Samaritan came that way, he had compassion on him. "Was moved with compassion" is the way it is usually expressed. "Moved with compassion"—that is a suggestive phrase! If the priest and the Levite had any of that holy fire burning upon the altars of their hearts, it was not hot enough to generate sufficient steam to set their hands in motion. But with the Samaritan it was different. He was so moved that he went to the man, bound up his wounds, put him upon his beast, took him to an inn, and took care of him. That compassion even moved his hand to his pocketbook the next morning, and he made provision for the care of the wounded man when he had gone. It is often through the hand that we must translate our good will into good deeds.

II

It is not surprising, therefore, that the New Testament has much to say about the touch of the hand of Jesus. Jesus was pre-eminently a physician. He so spoke of himself. "They that are whole," he said to the Pharisees, "need not a physician; but they that are sick." We speak of him as the Great Physician. If you turn the pages of the Gospels, it will amaze you

how much time Jesus gave to the task of healing. When Simon Peter was preaching in the house of Cornelius, he summed up the life of his Lord in one great bracing sentence: "[He] went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." That is, he healed those who gave him a chance whether they were hurt physically or mentally and spiritually.

Jesus put his hands upon sick bodies. In healing the body he often healed the mind. For instance, there was a leper whose harsh lot had made him bitter. The friends he once knew had doubtless let him down. Anyway he had ceased to believe that anybody cared. He had come even to doubt the love of God. When, therefore, he came to Jesus, it was with only a half faith. "Lord," he said, "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Being sick in body, he had also become sick in mind. But Jesus did choose to heal him. He touched him, saying, "Be thou clean."

Jesus healed not only those sick in body, but those sick in mind. If a sick body tends to beget a sick mind, it is even more true that a sick mind tends to bring about a sick body. We are discovering more and more fully the amazing power that the mind has over the body. Dr. Albert E. Day tells of a physician who made a rather cruel experiment. He had the nurses tell a large number of patients in a certain hospital that by mistake they had just been given an emetic. In accordance with this suggestion eighty

per cent of the patients began to vomit in a little while though the medicine given was entirely harmless.

Here is another story from life. A husband and wife, while visiting friends, went to bed in a dimly lighted room with which they were not familiar. It happened that he was a fresh-air fiend. She was the opposite. She liked to sleep in a room that was hermetically sealed. They argued for a while about opening the French windows beside the bed. At last, declaring that he was smothering, the husband flung wide the windows in spite of the protests of his wife. He then slept like a child and waked in the morning greatly refreshed. While he boasted of the good night's rest he had had, his wife declared that she had paid a big price for this rest, by contracting a bad cold. But when they looked about the room in the bright light of the morning, they discovered that the French windows were not windows at all but only the doors of a bookcase.

There are certain types of mental sickness that often make us physically ill. If we are already ill physically, they will certainly aggravate our illness. Hate, for instance, is a type of mental sickness. If you are allowing yourself the luxury of hating somebody, you are turning loose poison in your body. There never was a happy hater. It is not easy to find a healthy hater. Hate is a mental disease that often results in sickness of body. A sense of guilt is another form of mental sickness that makes for bodily illness.

Lady Macbeth, walking in her sleep, saying to her stained hand, "Out, damned spot!" is on the way to sickness of body as well as sickness of mind. Fear is another disease of the mind that takes an awful toll of the body. One of the most distinguished physicians of Vanderbilt University said recently that half of the patients occupying beds in our hospitals are suffering from mental rather than physical illness.

What did the touch of Jesus do? It gave wholeness. It gave health of body and health of mind. That is what it did for this prophet, John. As he faced this vision, as he faced the deadly foes about him, he was in danger of becoming obsessed by fear. But Christ laid his hand upon him saying, "Do not be afraid." He brought him courage by quieting his fears. That is a part of our task. That is often the task of the physician and nurse. I have wakened at night in a hospital from a drugged and feverish dream and been as completely lost as if dropped down in the heart of an African jungle. Being thus completely lost, I was as terrified as if in that jungle I was being surrounded by wild beasts. Then a wise and patient nurse has put her cooling hand on my fevered forehead, saying, "Do not be afraid." And as she pointed out the familiar objects of the room, my fears were banished and I was able to sleep. We are to co-operate with God in bringing comfort and courage.

Then the touch of the Risen Christ upon John brought him a sense of adequacy. He was not afraid

even of the terrible foes that confronted him because the touch of Christ had given him a sense of power. When the saints tell us of the secret of their sense of adequacy in the presence of life's difficulties, they so often explain it by saying, "The hand of the Lord was upon me." We can understand that because there is power in the touch even of the human hand. The child is not afraid when his hand is in the hand of his mother. It is said that when Wellington sent one of his officers on a mission of unusual peril, that officer asked for a grip of the hand of his brave leader before he went on that mission.

Here is a story of Florence Nightingale, to whom the nursing profession owes more than to any other man or woman. When a soldier in the Crimea had to have his limb amputated without an anesthetic, his physician thought that he could not bear the shock. But the soldier maintained that he could under one condition. He said, "I can if the Angel of the Crimea"—as Florence Nightingale was called—"will hold my hand." So she took the soldier's rough hand in hers and held it with the tenderness of a mother. While she held it, the knife cut through the tender flesh and the saw rasped through the bone, and there was never a groan on the part of the soldier. When the physician complimented him, he replied, "I could not do otherwise. My hand was in the hand of the Angel of the Crimea." The hand of Jesus, then, was a healing and comforting hand, and he commits this same task

to us in general, but to you physicians and nurses in particular.

III

How can you best accomplish this task?

1. Naturally you must know what you are about. Nothing will take the place, in this high calling of yours, of knowledge and of painstaking work. But this does not tell the whole story. Two physicians may be equally well trained and equally skillful, but vastly different in their effectiveness. The same is true of nurses. Even if you see nothing in your task except your pay check you may be just as skillful as one who sees far more, but you will not be as effective.

To be at your best in this as in any other field, you need to bring to it the highest of all motives. You can serve better if you have sympathy, tenderness, understanding. You can serve better if you bring to your task the transfiguring power of religion. Jesus saw something sacred in these human bodies of ours. They are the temples of the Holy Spirit. They are so sacred, he tells us, that in touching them we touch him. He is still going on a mission of healing. When you go on that same mission, if you have eyes to see, you will meet him.

There is nothing that will make your task so abidingly worthful to yourself as a high religious motive. There is nothing else that will so tinge it with the glow of perpetual romance. There may even come times when it will supply the one dynamic that will keep

you going. Some of you doubtless already know how to sympathize with the nurse of Tennyson's poem:

> "O how could I serve in the wards if
> the hope of the world were a lie?
> How could I bear with the sights and
> the loathsome smells of disease
> But that He said 'Ye do it to me, when
> ye do it to these'?"

But best of all, if you go girded with this high motive, you will bring something to your patients in your personality even richer and better than you can possibly bring in your hands.

You physicians and nurses have access to us when we are most approachable. You come when our pride and self-sufficiency are often flat in the dust. If you yourselves are mentally sick, tense, at war with yourselves, you cannot possibly do what you could otherwise. Here is a story from life. A nurse was given the care of a bottle-fed baby in a certain hospital. That baby at once began to sleep badly and to lose weight. Upon investigation it was found that the nurse was passing through a period of inner strife. When the baby was taken from her and put in the care of another nurse who was at peace with herself, it began at once to recover its appetite and to sleep well.

As fear is contagious, so is courage. Here is an experience for which I shall never cease to be grateful. When my physician came to me just before a danger-

ous major operation, he said with quiet confidence, "I want you to know that I have made this operation a matter of much prayer. I have faith to believe that God is going to help me to do it successfully." Smile if you will, whether that faith gave any skill to his hand or not, it gave a new courage to my heart. Those who go about their ministry with this high faith will surely lose none of their skill. Not only so, but their touch upon those to whom they minister will be at times the very touch of Christ.

V

THE COLD CHURCH

"I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love."

REVELATION 2:4 (A.R.V.)

THE BOOK OF REVELATION IS IN A SENSE AN EPISTLE addressed to the Church of that day. The seven letters contained in chapters two and three are therefore letters within a letter. The first of these is addressed to the church at Ephesus. Ephesus was at that time a great and thriving city. It was a cosmopolitan city of rich and poor, of cultured and ignorant, of artisans and merchants. Here was the famous temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The city derived much of its wealth from the manufacture and sale of images of this goddess. Here paganism was strong, seasoned, and respectable.

Into this wicked and idolatrous city came the heralds of the Cross. Among them was the eloquent, gifted,

but imperfectly instructed Apollos. Timid Timothy had preached here; also John, the Beloved Apostle. Tradition says that these two, along with the Virgin Mary, are buried here. Here no doubt had preached the author of this book. But the church owed most to Paul, the ablest and the hottest heart of them all. He had preached here for nearly three years. Under his leadership the church had become an institution of power both in the city and in the surrounding country. It was to the official board of this church that Paul gave that marvelous address recorded in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Acts. In it he urged them to watchfulness and warned them of the wolves that would one day threaten their flock.

Since the giving of that warning, more than a quarter century has passed. Today, John, speaking by inspiration of his Risen Lord, is sending this letter. It begins with a note of authority. The Christ in whose name he writes qualifies as an expert. He speaks as one who knows: "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know. . . . ."

I

What does John, speaking in behalf of Christ, know about this church? He knows much that is good. It would fairly make our hearts sing to hear such commendations of the church of which we are a part.

1. "I know thy works," he declares. "I know the difference that your presence in that city has made. I know the beneficent changes that you have wrought in the hearts of individuals, in the homes of the people, in all human relationships. I know the shattered and broken lives that you have remade. I know how you have changed despair into hope, and hate into love." In the Book of Acts we read of a riot in this city that was brought about by those interested in the image trade. This church had so successfully brought to the people of Ephesus the living Christ that many of them had thrown away their images of Diana, while others were refusing to buy. Thus the evil of idolatry was being swept away. The presence of this church was making a difference.

"I know thy works." Our Master can say the same about every living church today. The church whose presence in the city fails to make that city better is a dead church. "I know thy works"—that word our Lord ought to be able to say, not only to every church, but to every member of the church. Can he say it about you and me? What is there of good in our church, what is there of good in our city, or in our world, that simply could not be there but for the fact of our presence? If there is nothing, then our Christianity is a sheer futility. Every living church, every living Christian, is accomplishing something. Where these farm, the wheat fields grow golden and ripe for harvest.

Not only does every living church have to its credit some positive good; it also accomplishes other results that often none sees but God. For the presence of a vigorous church in a community not only accomplishes worth-while tasks, but makes many an evil impossible. This is the type of achievement that can never get into our reports. Granting that our members are faulty, granting that many an evil still stalks unafraid in our presence, yet this we need to bear in mind—the situation would be far worse if we were not here. As Christians, we are the salt of the earth. We not only remake broken lives; we keep many a life from being broken. This was what the church at Ephesus was doing. Therefore John, speaking for his Lord, could say, "I know thy works."

2. "I know thy toil." That is "I know the effort, the sacrifices, the struggles that have been necessary in order for you to accomplish the tasks that you have accomplished." This church at Ephesus has not dreamed its way to great achievements. Its accomplishments have been at the price of strenuous and sacrificial effort. These saints have been able to bless because they have been willing to bleed. That is ever the case. Nothing worth while is accomplished in any field except at the price of hard work. Wherever there is an abundant harvest, it has come at the price of somebody's toil. We do not expect to win in any field of endeavor without work. At least there seems to be only one exception, and that is in the field of

religion. So often we seem to fancy that here we ought to make vast progress, without any effort whatever!

"I know thy toil." I wonder if the Master can say that about you and me. Many of us take our church membership far too lightly. For some the cost is naked nothing. To such it is worth exactly what it cost, and that only. One day the Master saw a great crowd that to our gaze might have looked like so many happy folks on a picnic. But he saw them as they really were. Therefore they reminded him of sheep without a shepherd. He not only saw these people as they were; he saw also the amazing possibilities that were locked in them. Therefore he said, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he would thrust forth labourers into his harvest." That is the need of this hour, and of every hour. We have enough drones, enough idlers, enough good people who are at ease in Zion. What we need is laborers, men and women of whom Jesus can say, "I know thy toil, and I know the works that are the result of this toil. I know beautiful deeds that are blossoming like flowers all over your city that would be impossible but for you."

3. "I know your zeal for the truth, your sincere and intelligent orthodoxy. You have tried them who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them false." These people had been instructed by some of the greatest teachers of the Early Church. They knew what they believed and why. In the light of

this teaching, they tested the traveling preachers that came their way. If they found them speaking what was not according to sound doctrine, they rejected them. That was wise. Too many of our professing Christians know neither what they believe nor why.

4. Not only did these people have a zeal for right doctrine, not only did they reject false teachers, but they rejected also those whose lives did not ring true. They were commended because they could not endure evil men. They refused to have fellowship in the church with open and flagrant sinners. There was a time, even in recent years, when those whose lives were a discredit to the church were expelled. I am not saying that this was the best method. I am quite sure that it was not. Jesus had a renegade by the name of Judas in his group, but he refused to turn him out. He knew that if love and patience could not save him, expulsion would be sure to fail. But even expulsion, faulty as it is, might be better than the attitude of indifference that often characterizes us. These people had such a genuine zeal for right living that they refused to tolerate evil men.

5. "I know thy patience." Patience seems to have been an outstanding characteristic of this church. It is mentioned more than once. Its membership had been patient under opposition, patient under persecution. When days were sunny, they could be counted on. When days were cloudy, they could be counted on none the less. When the church was prospering and going

from victory to victory, they were there. When sore trials came and they seemed faced with disaster and defeat, they still stood by. "You are enduring patiently and have borne up for my sake and have not wearied."

What a church this was! Had this letter, written by one who could speak with authority, come to me regarding my own church, the first part of it would have brought great joy. I think I might have left off when I had read these words of commendation to give a shout of real enthusiasm. The church was working patiently. It was accomplishing something. It was seeking to be Christian both in doctrine and in life. Surely, we feel, this leaves little else to be desired. What more could one ask of any church? Yet, there was something wrong. Having said all these lovely things, the author passes on to his one adverse criticism.

II

What is that criticism? "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." "Yet I have this against you," Weymouth translates it, "that you no longer love Me as you did at first." "But I have this against you," Moffatt translates it; "you have given up loving one another as you did at first." All these translations are correct. This church was still active and earnest. It was decent, respectable, and orthodox. Its one fault was that it was failing in its love for Christ and, therefore, for one another. It was losing its glow and its

zest, its fire and enthusiasm. It was growing cold, and about the most tragic thing in all the world is a cold church.

"I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." First love is the love of espousal. It is the love of the honeymoon days. Sad to say, the honeymoon for many married couples is an exceedingly brief period. It is over almost as quickly as the wedding tour. How soon, for many, the radiance and romance fade into the dull, drab commonplace! If you have been married as long as twenty years and do not love each other better than you did in the honeymoon days, the chances are that you love each other far less. And if you do not love Christ more today than when you first met him, you are on the way to ceasing to love him altogether. In spite, therefore, of all that was commendable in this live and active church, there remained this pathetic fact that the warm springtime of love was slowly changing into winter.

Just why this change was taking place, we are not told. But as we read between the lines, I think we can make a fairly accurate guess. The coldness was the result of something that was in its beginning commendable. At first these Christians had contended earnestly for the faith because of their love for the truth and of their hatred of error. But it is very hard persistently to contend with some misguided brother without growing a bit proud and critical and pharisaical. It is well enough to contend, provided we can do so in a

spirit of love. But how easy it is for the contender to come to damn everybody who does not agree with him! Every heresy-hunter is in great danger of losing his first love if he has not already lost it before he begins his unedifying task. "Better that error live than that love should die."

III

What is the tragedy of the cold church?

1. It is lacking in winsomeness. What is the most attractive characteristic that either a church or an individual can possess? It is love for others. The Early Church, because of its warmth of heart, breathed on the world of that day like a spiritual springtime. "How these Christians love each other!" the amazed pagans exclaimed. They watched the Christians as they entertained strangers and declared that they even loved folks they had never seen. And sometimes when pestilence was abroad and these pagans would turn their own loved ones out to die, they were awed and astounded to see the Christians take them to their homes and to their hearts. It was the love of the Early Church that made the desert to rejoice and to blossom as a rose.

In recent years a book entitled *How to Win Friends and Influence People* has been popular. There is much sound sense in the book; there is also much sound selfishness. But the author is right in teaching that friendliness begets friends. If you feel lonely and unfriended,

if you deeply yearn for the joy of human love, there is a roadway to this treasure that the weakest and the most handicapped can find. In order to be loved, it is not necessary to be either beautiful, or gifted, or young. There is just one necessity, and that is to love. Love begets love as certainly as night follows day. The church or the individual, therefore, that has grown cold has lost the supreme secret of winsomeness.

2. Not only does a loveless church cease to be attractive; it also finally ceases to be active. This cold church was still working; it still had worth-while deeds to its credit. But it was going ahead largely upon the momentum of the past. Sometime ago I was out driving, and my car ran out of gasoline. But it did not stop the very instant the tank was empty. It ran for a little while under the momentum that it had gathered while there was power. But soon the wheels would not turn another time. The church that has lost its first love may be active for a while, but soon its activities will cease. One reason there are so many idlers in the church is that many have ceased to care.

3. The final tragedy of the cold church is that not only is it lacking in winning power and in effort, but it is on its way to certain death. All that is necessary in order for the individual Christian to die is to do nothing. The same is true of a church. How long will our church live? Just so long as its membership cares enough to carry on its work! Therefore Jesus warned that unless these recovered their first love he

would move the lampstand out of its place. This does not mean that in anger he will come in judgment. It only means that the loveless church will die a natural death. The church cannot live except as it loves.

IV

Is there any hope for this church that is growing cold? There is. It is because of this hope that this letter was written. The author tells us that in order to pass from winter into springtime only three tseps are necessary.

1. "Remember whence thou art fallen." To cease to love is always to fall. Jesus comes, therefore, to these who have thus fallen and seeks to call to their minds those great yesterdays when their hearts were warm. "Remember," he says. How beautifully tender! He is appealing to them by the memories of the best that they have known. It is thus that one loving human heart which has been wounded might appeal to another. Here, for instance, is a wife who has been made to realize that there is a widening chasm between her and the husband she loves. For years they have lived joyfully together. But now there is coldness where once there was warmth, indifference where there was once glowing love. How naturally would she appeal to him by the memories of those gracious days that had dropped into the sunset! "Remember," she would say, "how we have laughed together, and how also we have wept! Remember the comfort and cour-

age of our mutual helpfulness in love's bright morning long ago."

Thus Jesus appeals to this church, and to you and to me: "Remember whence thou art fallen. Remember that great hour when you first met me. Remember those better days when you could sing with reality, 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!' Remember how I have been your comfort in the hours of grief, your companion in hours of loneliness. Remember how I have been your stay in the night watches, and your morning and sunrise at the breaking of day. There was a time when you sang zestfully, 'I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord.' There was a time when for love's sake you labored for a better world. Remember whence thou art fallen."

2. "Repent." This cold church needs to repent even as you and I. Of what are we to repent? We, as this church, are to repent of our lack of love. The purpose of remembering is to lead to repentance. When the prodigal was away in the far country, it was the memory of his better days that made it impossible for him to stay there. He was haunted by home scenes and home voices. He could not brush out of his mind the memory of the kindest face into which he had ever looked, and the tenderest heart that he had known—that of his father. At last he could endure it no longer. These tormenting and heartening memories so pressed

upon him that he said, "I will arise and go to my father."

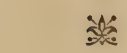
3. "Do the first works." That is, "Act as you did at first." This is to be the outcome of repentance. To repent is to change one's mind. It is such a change of mind as to lead to a change of conduct. It was not enough for the prodigal to realize his own hunger. It was not enough for him to be gripped by homesickness for his father. His repentance was complete only when he turned his steps home and kept going till he felt the kiss of his father's lips and the hug of his father's arms. It was this that the memory of her better days was to do for this church. Maybe you too have lost the glow out of your life. Maybe your heart has grown cold. Then let the memories of your better days lead you to turn your steps to where Love is waiting to forgive and to forget. "Remember whence thou art fallen, and repent and act as you did at first." Doing this, your winter will surely change into spring.

VI

THE RICH CHURCH

"But thou art rich."

REVELATION 2:9



JUST FORTY MILES FROM THE CITY OF EPHESUS stood and still stands the city of Smyrna. Of all the seven cities it alone is of any importance today. The others have gone into utter eclipse. Smyrna was a progressive and prosperous city. It was inhabited very largely by Jews. These Jews were exceedingly friendly to Rome. It would seem that they were chiefly interested in material wealth. They were eager to stay on friendly terms with the powers that be. Hence, they with their fellow citizens had built a stature to the Roman Emperor Tiberius. These Jews were especially antagonistic to Christianity. The first persecution suffered by this church was at the hands of Jews. Rome continued their cruel work a few years later. Here still is pointed out the tomb of the beloved

bishop of this church, Polycarp, who died a martyr to his faith in the year 155.

I

It is to this hard-pressed church that John is sending a letter on behalf of his Master. In the midst of this letter he pays this church, by way of parenthesis, a great compliment. He says of it, "Thou art rich." That is a word of commendation to quicken interest. It tends to lay firm hands upon our sluggish minds and to shake them into wakefulness. The more worldly we are, the more thrilling that word becomes, especially if we fail to understand the nature of the wealth of which the author is speaking. "Thou art rich." What happy pictures that suggests! At once we see a lovely building. There are beautiful pews, comfortably cushioned. There is exquisite music. There is a scholarly and able minister. There is a well-dressed congregation. Here is a church that can not only minister to our religious needs, but also help us incidentally toward the realization of our social and economic ambitions. "But thou art rich."

The phrase has a pleasing sound even to some of us who are in the ministry. Sometime ago a rather worldly and cynical woman was telling me of attending an evening service at a well-known city church. She declared that the pastor apologized to her at the close of the service for both the quality and quantity of his congregation. "You ought to have been here

this morning," he said regretfully. "We have a whole pew full of millionaires in the morning. We call it 'Millionaire's Row.' But my best people do not attend in the evening." If attending one service a day is a mark of spiritual aristocracy, not to attend at all ought to rank one as belonging to royalty.

Not only is John's statement an arresting compliment, but it is also unique. There is no other church in the New Testament that is described as being rich. There is one other that thought of itself as rich. That was the lukewarm church in Laodicea. Here is what it thought of itself: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." But here is the startling truth as Jesus saw it: "If there is a pitiable one it is you, wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

That is, this church was not in reality rich at all. Of course it was rich in things. But that is not enough. A rich church is to be prized, provided it is rich in values other than money. The Bible has no war to make against money in itself. Money is power. A consecrated rich man can render a greater service, other things being equal, than a consecrated poor man. This is the case because a million dollars dedicated to God can do more than a dedicated penny. A rich man who is also a good man can be a great asset, but a rich man who is self-centered and grasping can be a great liability. This church at Laodicea, being rich only in

things, was in reality poverty-stricken. It was suffering from delusions or grandeur.

Some years ago while holding a meeting in the capital of another state, I became friendly with a fine Christian physician who was superintendent of the state hospital. He invited me to sit in on some of his clinics. Among those who came before us was a fine-looking chap who had a sense of well-being written in every line of his face. "What do you do?" asked the physician. "I am a businessman," came the proud reply. "I own all the national banks in the United States and half of the post offices." "My!" said the physician, "You must work a great many men." "I do," came the answer. "Henry Ford works for me. Old Man John D. Rockefeller used to work for me." But when the physician offered him a quarter, he accepted it eagerly. "Why did you accept that money," someone questioned him, "if you are so rich?" "I did not wish to hurt the doctor's feelings," was the prompt reply. I think I have never met a rich man who enjoyed his wealth any more.

Not only is this an exciting and unique compliment, but it is in a sense all-inclusive. The Master had some lovely words of commendation for the church at Ephesus. But there was also one bit of adverse criticism. "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." But with this church he has no fault to find. By this we are not to understand that the church was absolutely perfect. It had not completely arrived,

but it was on its way. It was increasingly becoming a glorious church without spot or blemish. When, therefore, the Master said, "Thou art rich," he was saying about the best that could be said. This commendation was gripping, unique, and all-inclusive.

II

Wherein was it rich? Of course, it was rich because of certain assets, but it was also rich in spite of certain liabilities. We are always rich, if at all, *in spite of* as well as *because of*. Look at some of the liabilities of this church. I do not name them in the order used by John.

1. It was a slandered church. "I know the blasphemy." A better translation of the word is *"slander."* This church was ringed about by foes. These foes were giving themselves the luxury of being harshly critical. They were tearing the reputation of this church into shreds by saying all manner of evil against it falsely. The more they critized, the more they hated. And the more they hated, the more they criticized. It is possible for us to talk ourselves into hating the best friend we have in the world. This church, then, was being slandered.

2. Not only was it being slandered, but it was being persecuted. The persecution was the natural outcome of the slander. When Rome burned, the Christians were accused of burning it. The accusation was false. It was a slander, but it led to opposition and to bitter

persecution. It caused hundreds to be fed to the lions or to be hanged upon forests of crosses. The persecution against this church at Smyrna had not gone quite so far yet, but it had had two results. These slanderers had perhaps incited mobs that had gone about despoiling the shops and the homes of these Christians. It is amazing how much more cruel a mob is than the individuals that compose it. Many a man in a mob will do evil deeds that he would never think of doing if he were alone. These people were being pillaged and plundered somewhat as the Jews have been pillaged and plundered in Nazi Germany. Not only were they thus robbed of their goods, but they were also robbed of an opportunity to work. Men were thrown out of position. Trade-unions would not employ them.

3. This led to a third tragic liability. The membership of this church was reduced to poverty. "I know," says the author, "thy poverty." "Poverty" here is a strong word. It means beggary. These people had been reduced to utter want. The wolf was howling at the door. If they had a pastor, they could keep him only by his being willing to share their poverty with them. They did not have enough between them to buy a half-dozen songbooks. Slandered, persecuted, they had been reduced to dire poverty.

4. Finally, the worst is yet to come. After the author has named these liabilities, we expect him to encourage the church by telling of the better days ahead, but he says the opposite. He declares that the worst is

yet to be. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, ... and ye shall have tribulation ten days." Of course ten days here is not to be taken literally. It only means that they are to be tried for a brief and definite period. During that period there is to be imprisonment, ending for some in martyrdom. Some of them were headed out toward ghastly death. It was, therefore, to a slandered, poverty-stricken, and persecuted church that was facing yet greater persecution that the Master said, "Thou art rich."

III

What, then, were its assets? What did the membership of this church possess that made it rich in spite of its liabilities?

1. The members of this church were rich in the possession of a Saviour who could enter into full sympathy with them. "I know the blasphemy and persecution and poverty." That means far more than that their Lord simply knew their situation. It means that he knew through his own experience. He knew because he had been tempted in all points just as they were being tempted. If they were being slandered, he understood since he had been slandered. If they were being persecuted, he had passed through that experience before them. If they were poor, he had been more destitute than the birds, more homeless than the foxes of the mountains.

What a privilege it is, when some great tragedy falls upon us, to know the comfort of an understanding friend! The other day a mother in my city lost a little child. A neighbor came in to comfort her. She talked beautifully. But the brokenhearted mother listened without seemingly receiving much comfort. When she had gone, another mother came who did not talk half so well; but she had a little high chair at home in which nobody sat any more, a few toys with which nobody played. She put her arms around her friend and simply said, "There, there, I understand." And that understanding had healing in it. But how much more healing there is the understanding of One who is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

2. These saints were rich in convictions that they felt were worth living for, and, if need be, dying for. "Be thou faithful unto death," is the Master's appeal. "Faithful" here means convinced. It is to be convinced of the faithfulness of Christ himself. That is an attribute of God with which the saints of the Old and New Testaments are constantly steadying themselves. They were sure that God would never fail them, that he would never let them down. Their confidence in his faithfulness enabled them to be faithful. Because they were sure of their Lord, they could stand up and take it in an evil day while others without their faith went to pieces.

While visiting in Scotland, I was interested in that

great rock against which Fitz-James is said to have leaned his back as he met his foes with these brave words:

> "Come one, come all! this rock shall fly
> From its firm base as soon as I."

These saints of Smyrna were in a hard situation. They were few among many. But they refused to play the coward. They refused to give over the fight. They leaned their backs against the solid conviction of the faithfulness of God and were steadfast. "I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

Not only did their convictions enable them to stand up and take the worst that their foes could inflict, but they kept them loyal even when they could not understand. They refused to let Christ down even when it looked as if he had let them down. That is magnificent.

I remember a story that, when I was a boy, used to move me to tears. It told of an Englishman who long ago went on horseback to a certain village to collect a sum of money. As he was returning with his gold tied to his saddle, he stopped at the roadside at noon to eat his lunch. With him was his faithful dog who was his constant companion. He untied the sack of gold and set it beside him that it might not be out of his reach at any time. After he had eaten, he fell asleep for a few moments. Then he mounted his horse and

continued his journey. But he forgot his gold. The dog began to run in front of the horse and bark and turn back, but the man went on his way. Then the dog began frantically to snap at the horse's heels and turn back. But still his master did not understand. At last he decided that his dog had gone mad. With great reluctance he turned in his saddle and shot the dog through the head. The faithful beast looked at him with questioning eyes; then he dropped in his tracks, and the man went on his way. But he had not gone far until he discovered his loss. Then he understood. At once he put his horse to a run and hurried back. He came to the place where the dog had fallen. The road had a crimson stain, but the dog was gone. When he reached the gold, there was his dog with a paw on either side and with his chin resting upon the treasure. He was dead. He had not understood, but he had remained loyal unto death.

These people were steadying themselves by solid convictions and were holding to their loyalty even when God seemed to have forgotten them.

3. Then these saints were rich in the possession of a good will that all the slander and persecution of their enemies could not destroy. When they were hated, they refused to give way to hating. When they were lied about, they did not deal in lies. They did not declare that they would get even with their enemies at any cost. Had they done so, they would have become like their enemies. Jesus could hate sin without hating

the sinner. We have a great tendency, as someone has pointed out, to hate the sinner and to love his sin.

One day a brilliant young man was preaching in Jerusalem. He so antagonized his audience that they dragged him outside the city and mobbed him. They stoned him to death as we might stone a snake by the roadside. Though he was so heavily outnumbered, I can imagine Stephen might have successfully hurled a stone or two and thus have gone down fighting. But he did not. Instead he went down praying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Thus he died with a light in his face that even death could not blow out. "They saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." When the ugly scene was over, it certainly looked like miserable defeat for Stephen, but in reality it was everlasting victory. There was at least one man present who could never forget. That was a young man named Saul. The shining face of Stephen haunted him. He could not resist a man who could throw about the shoulders of his murderers "the sheltering folds of a protecting prayer." I am quite sure that the fact that a little later this great soul was saying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" was due, under God, to Stephen more than to any other single influence.

These saints at Smyrna had convictions that gave them courage to stand in the face of danger. They also had a Christlike good will which the worst that their foes could do could not change to hate. That is some-

thing that the world cannot imitate. It was the one characteristic of Christ that has perhaps won the heart of men above all else. When bold Simon thought of that in his Master that moved him supremely, I think it was this: "When he was reviled, [he] reviled not again." It is this good will that goes on loving that wins all the victories that are permanent. Force may triumph, but its triumphs are always temporary. These saints, therefore, were to be congratulated because in the face of bitter persecution they maintained a good will that was akin to that of their Lord.

4. Finally, the members of this church were rich in the possession of a quality of life over which neither persecution nor poverty nor death could have any destructive power. Though pillaged and peeled, they were not utterly impoverished. In fact, their sufferings had only made them the richer. Their want brought them greater wealth. Their weakness was a pathway to power. Their crucifixion was enabling them to be crowned. They were learning through their own experiences what Paul had learned through his. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

This they were finding to work in the here and now. They were sure it would still work beyond this world with its griefs and graves. When, therefore, the Master said to them, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," they knew that he was not speaking of any material crown. He was not

offering them some fading laurel wreath. He was offering them life at its best in the here and now. These saints had found a life that was good today. They were sure that it would be good tomorrow. They were sure it would be good when they were passing through the Valley of the Shadow. They were sure it would be good when they had passed "to where beyond these voices there is peace."

"Thou art rich." I wonder if our Lord can say that to us as a congregation. I wonder if he can say it to us as individuals. What treasure do you possess in the here and now that is worth living for and worth dying for? What have you that will abide? What have you that neither failing banks nor wrecking worlds can wrench out of your hands? If you have no wealth that is real, then the fault is your own, for the riches possessed by this church are for every one of us. "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." If we were to claim all that he is offering us this morning, it would make us the envy of the angels.

VII

THE CHURCH AT SATAN'S CAPITAL

"I know .... where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is."

REVELATION 2:13

PERGAMUM DID NOT OWE ITS IMPORTANCE TO ITS commerce. It was a religious center. It gave hospitality to many gods. It had temples to Zeus, to Aphrodite, to Aesculapius, and to many others. Aesculapius, the god of medicine, was the patron god of the city. Had Paul visited Pergamum as he did Athens, he could have said to its inhabitants what he said on Mars Hill, "I perceive that ye are very religious." Then Pergamum was like Athens in another respect. It was a center of culture. Here was one of the largest libraries of the ancient world. Its shelves contained more than two hundred thousand volumes. The city was a maker of books. The word "parchment" is said to have been derived from the name of this city.

I

Who established the church in Pergamum we do not know. Be that as it may, the Master, speaking through John, gives to this church a threefold commendation. I am analyzing this commendation in reverse order.

1. "Thou hast not denied my faith." This is capable of two interpretations. The Master may mean, "You have clung to your faith in me in spite of all opposition." But he might be saying, "You have not denied the faith that was mine." When Jesus walked among men, his was a life of faith. The writer to the Hebrews calls him "the author and perfecter of faith." Everybody that knew him knew him as a man of faith. When he hung on the cross, one of the taunts that his enemies flung into his face was this, "He trusted in God." Believing in God, he went to what seemed utter defeat without fear. He was supremely sure that the good would at last win. He was sure that the prayer that he taught us to pray for the coming of his Kingdom would one day be fully answered. In that high faith he lived and died. "You," he says to this struggling church, "are sharing that same high faith."

2. "Thou holdest fast my name." That is, "You have been true to me personally." This was a loyal, a steadfast church. Swift currents swept about it, but it held firm. It was unshaken and unshakable. It was dependable. It was loyal to its convictions. Sharing in the faith of its Lord, it was sharing his courage, his fine capacity to hold its course, even though that course

led to a cross. Holding fast the name of Jesus always makes for strength and steadfastness. I recall one such steadfast person, a man of many responsibilities. At one time he was president of twenty-seven different organizations in his city. I knew him in his prosperous days. I knew him, too, when the economic depression had swept away his fortune. I knew him when his only son had been laid low by an incurable disease, when his only daughter had had to be sent to an institution for the insane. But I never saw him when his face did not have in it something of the radiance of the morning. During the seven years I was privileged to be his pastor, I never recall hearing him speak a discouraging word. He was a staunch man. Through his faith in Christ, he had become "as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as a shadow of a great rock in a weary land." "Amidst the hottest conflicts," said Jesus, "thou holdest fast."

3. But this commendation reaches its climax, I think, in the words, "I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is." "You have kept the faith," said Jesus. "You have held fast. This you have done in the most difficult situation imaginable. This you have done in spite of the fact that you have had to face stark impossibilities." Pergamum was the headquarters of the cult of emperor worship. This made it a field of peculiar difficulty. It was so difficult that the author speaks of it as the site of the very throne of Satan him-

self. It was the very center of his infernal empire. He had his agents and his emissaries elsewhere, but here he carried on in person. It is John's way of saying that here was evil at its wicked worst.

I cannot help wondering just when this city came to be distinguished as Satan's capital. Was it before the church was established here, or was it later on? It may be that it had been his greatest stronghold for many years. If so, then the church had been established here, not because the situation was hopeful, but because it was so hopeless. If this is true, then those founding and carrying on the work of the church were doing so not because their task was easy, but because they had the gallantry to hear the call of their Lord for those who were willing to face desperate odds. These were the heroic leaders of what seemed to be a forlorn hope. They were where they were because they could be trusted to face gigantic impossibilities with never a whimper and never a whine. They were here not because there was no need, but because the need was so frightfully great.

Years before, a young minister by the name of Titus found himself in a somewhat similar situation. In fact, his field so bristled with difficulties that he saw nothing to do but to leave as soon as possible. He wrote a letter to his friend and teacher Paul, telling him how impossible his situation was, and that he was waiting only a word from him to make his escape. But Paul did not tell him to quit. He did agree with him

as to the difficulties he faced. In fact, he seems to have mentioned some that Titus had overlooked. "But these difficulties," he added, "are not reasons for quitting, but for standing your ground. It was for this cause that I left you in Crete that you might set right the things that are wrong. If all things were as they ought to be," he seems to say, "God wouldn't need you and me. But since they are not, we are needed."

When I was quite a young preacher, I was transferred to a certain conference to become a pastor of a desirable city church. Arrived at the seat of the conference, I heard much talk about the desperate plight of the church at B. The pastor of the church had gone wrong, and had had to quit the ministry and membership of the church. As a result the congregation, taking sides for and against, was torn into fragments. Everywhere I turned I heard the preachers saying one to another, "I certainly pity the man who goes to B. May the Lord help him!" I listened to it all with considerable indifference. At least I had no personal interest. I was sure that I already knew where I was going. When the hour came for the bishop to read the appointments I calmly sat down to find out where all the other brethren were going. But in less than five minutes, I had been read out, not to my city church, but to the church at B. I was absolutely stunned. I think I complained a bit over my hard lot to an old minister who was my friend. "You ought to feel greatly honored to go to a place like that," he answered.

"It looks so utterly impossible." I was not greatly encouraged by his words. However, I dared to go to work and to do my best. As a result I enjoyed there one of the most fruitful years of my ministry. If you are in a hard place, therefore, try to believe that you are there because your Lord knows that he can count on you to play the man in the face of difficulties.

But while it is possible that Pergamum had been Satan's capital for a long time, such may not have been the cause at all. It may be that Satan had set up his throne here because of the presence of this church. I rather like to think that such was the case. This body of saints was warring so valiantly, they were making such headway against the forces of evil in that city, that Satan had become alarmed. In this church he had found a foeman worthy of his steel. A really live and conquering church always meets opposition. It is both refreshing and hopeful when the forces of evil begin to vilify the Church and bemean its ministers. That shows that those evil forces are becoming afraid. Every victorious era of the Church has been one of opposition. A church that nobody fights is very apt to be so trifling and so useless as to be ignored.

This I am sure is the explanation of that rather shocking word from the lips of Jesus, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!" Why so? If I can keep the friendship of honest men and of crooks, of those who keep the law and of the violators of the law, if I can have bootleggers and their patrons sing-

ing my praises along with the decent members of society, if I can stay on good terms with those who put money above men, coin above character, and of those who put first things first, am I not the gainer thereby? Jesus says not. He says that a Christian must be a positive force in the world; that, standing as he does for individual and social righteousness, he is sure to arouse antagonism. He is certain to meet opposition.

That is absolutely true. If we as Christians, therefore, are meeting no opposition, we had better look anew at our guidebook, for the chances are that we are on the wrong road. But this church was being fought. One of its members had already paid for his loyalty to Jesus with his life. He is spoken of as a faithful witness. He was called Antipas, but doubtless that was not his real name; it was a nickname given by his friends or his enemies, or both. The word is made up of two Greek words—*anti,* "against," and *pas,* "all." They said that he was opposed to everybody and everything. He was no soft son of compromise. In fact, he stood so firmly by his convictions that he went to his death in the fellowship of him who had dared to tread the winepress alone. This church, then, is commended because it has been faithful in the most difficult of situations.

II

But even this church was not faultless. While the congregation was, on the whole, of a high order, there were certain members upon whom the Master could

not look with approval. There were those who held to the heresy of the Nicolaitans. Practically nothing is known of the faith of this sect. But this letter would seem to indicate that their doctrine was close akin to that of the followers of Balaam. Therefore, when we discover what the doctrine of Balaam is, we shall know the false faith that was threatening the strength of the steadfast and vigorous church of Pergamum. What is this doctrine?

Read again the story of Balaam as recorded in the Book of Numbers. Balaam was an able and eloquent man who was thought by the men of his day to have the power to bless or to curse whomsoever he would. Therefore, when the hordes of Israelites came out of Egypt and camped along the borders of King Balak, this king, feeling powerless to fight so great a multitude, sent a committee to Balaam to hire him to pronounce a curse upon these troublesome strangers. Now Balaam, in spite of the fact that he was a strange mixture, was a very religious man. Therefore, before accepting Balak's invitation, he made that invitation a matter of prayer. As he prayed, the answer came clear and convincing. He was not to curse Israel, for Israel was blessed. Therefore, Balaam frankly told the committee that he could not grant their request and sent them away disappointed. He himself was also keenly disappointed, for he was eager for the royal reward that would have been his had he accepted the king's invitation.

The matter should have ended with this, but it did not. A few days later Balaam was entertaining a larger and more important committee from Balak. This time the king made his invitation even more pressing. "Let nothing hinder thee from coming," he urged. And what answer did Balaam make? He should have said, "I have told you that to grant your request would be wrong, and it is therefore impossible for me to do so. But instead of answering in this fashion, he prayed over it again. The first time he prayed honestly, but this time he was not honest. He was simply begging that he might please himself without displeasing God. Thus he persuaded himself that the Lord had told him to go. Later when the angel of the Lord stood against him, he offered to go back but was told to go on. It is a picture of that utter moral confusion that results when one lacks the single eye.

Thus, fighting himself, Balaam went to curse Israel. But faulty as he was, there was one resolve to which he clung. Even the worst of men are often conscientious about something. Balaam vowed that he would speak the truth as he was given to see the truth, whatever the cost. But while determined to speak the truth as he saw it, he was at the same time determined not to see the truth if he could help it. His conduct was a bit like that of a businessman who would not tolerate the rascality of his partner if he knew of it, but who does his best to keep from knowing of it. Thus

Balaam, by keeping his rule while tearing a principle into shreds, refused to curse Israel, missed his reward, and went home empty-handed.

But this is not the end of the story. It would seem that Balaam came to Balak again and had a private conference. He told him that, while he could not curse Israel, he knew a sure way that Balak could induce the Israelites to curse themselves. "Just remind them," he said, "how I blessed them each time, in spite of the fact that I did not wish to do so. Make them believe that God will keep them, not only if they obey him, but also if they rebel against him, not only if they do right, but also if they do wrong." The Israelites gave heed to this easy and comfortable preaching. Under its spell they fell into the sin of sensuality. Thus they brought a curse upon themselves which neither Balaam nor anyone else could have brought.

"What, then, is the teaching of Balaam? It is that God's promises are unconditional, that they hold good whether we do our part or not. It is the doctrine that leads naturally to the sin of presumption, one of the sins to which Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. "If thou be the son of God," said the devil, "command that these stones be made bread." Jesus answered, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone." That is, "I am here within the will of God. Since I am here within his will, he will keep me." Then Satan passed over to the side of Jesus and even beyond. "You are right," he said, "he will keep you in any and all cir-

cumstances." Then he proceeded to set Jesus on a pinnacle of the temple and say, "Cast thyself down." But Jesus said, "Thou shalt not put the Lord thy God to the test. God will keep me in the path of duty, but nowhere else." If we fail to obey the laws of nature, we die. If we fail to obey the laws of our spiritual nature, we die. To call ourselves Christians, and then neglect our known duty, or put forth our hands to the unclean, ends in tragedy. Balaam taught an unconditional salvation, but no such salvation is known by the writers of the Bible or in human experience.

III

Now what does Jesus have to say to this church? He calls it to repent. The church as a whole is to repent of its tolerance of evil. Those who are guilty of actual transgression are to repent by giving up their evil ways and returning to their obedience to Christ. If they fail to do this, our Lord declares that he will fight against them with the sword of his mouth. This does not mean that his love will change to hate. Whether we repent or not, he will go on loving us forever. It does mean that one whose nature and name is love must oppose one who is of contrary character. This universe of ours is founded upon a basis of righteousness, and the very stars in their courses fight against him who chooses to travel a wrong road.

Then, to those who have remained faithful and to those who have overcome by repenting, Jesus makes

the following promise: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." Let us look at the latter of these promises first. It is hard to tell just what the white stone signifies, though various interpretations have been given. Some think it signifies pardon. Certain juries used to cast their ballots by the use of white and black stones. The practice survives today in some of our organizations where we speak of one who is rejected as being "black-balled." But it is more likely that the color of the stone has no special significance. It may serve simply as that upon which the new name is written. The new name is that which counts. To those who repent, Jesus always gives a new name, which means a new nature.

Then, to those repenting, he gives the hidden manna. The hidden manna is none other than Christ himself. He not only gives us our new nature, but he gives us the Bread from heaven by which that new nature is sustained. And you notice that it is hidden manna, and that the new name that he gives us is one that is known to no one but the one who receives it. That means that this new name and this hidden manna are not to be known except through experience. What is love? There is no use in consulting Webster. If you cannot consult your own experience, then you will never know. What is the Bread of Life? This, too,

is known only through experience. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: . . . . neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

"I know where thou dwellest!" How comforting! Years ago a little street waif slipped his hand into that of a kindly young physician and asked, "Do you want to know where we'uns live?" The doctor answered in the affirmative. Then the lad led him through the haunts of poverty and squalor and vice in the slums of London. And what this physician learned that night led him to establish the Dr. Bernardo Homes where thousands of forsaken waifs have found a chance to become useful men. And Jesus knows where we live. He knows our economic problems. He knows our domestic tragedies. He knows the difficulties we have at the office and at the factory and at the store. He knows the trying circumstances under which we must spend our daily lives. Not only does he know them, but he is able to give us grace sufficient to see our conflicts through with honor. Even if our lot is cast amid moral and spiritual deserts, he is able to feed us with hidden manna and to lead us to fountains of living water.

VIII

JEZEBEL'S CHURCH

"I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess."

REVELATION 2:20 (A.R.V.)

IN THIS LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA, Jesus introduces himself by a name that he has not used heretofore. There seems to be a stern note of authority in it, surpassing that to be found in any of the letters that we have yet considered. "These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished bronze." That is, Jesus comes to this church armed with all the authority that belongs to the Son of the Father. His is the very authority of God. His eyes are as a flame of fire; that is, he sees to the heart of things. He reads the individual, and he reads the church. He speaks as one who knows. "His feet are like unto burnished bronze." Bronze is strong. Hence, this

Christ is irresistible in his ongoing toward the accomplishment of his purpose. He is strong to tread down all the powers of the enemy.

Who established the church at Thyatira we do not know. The only person with whom we are acquainted that ever lived in this city is that charming woman named Lydia. When Paul first crossed over to Europe, he went to Philippi. In this Roman city there was no synagogue, but out in the country by the riverside was a place of prayer. Paul made his way there one Sabbath day and sat down and talked to a little group of women who had gathered there for prayer. Outwardly it was an insignificant meeting, but to the seeing eye it was one of vast importance. This was the case because, as Paul spoke, the Lord opened the heart of Lydia that she should believe the message. This brilliant and gifted woman who was thus converted was a seller of purple from Thyatira. It is possible that she was instrumental in establishing the Christian church in her own city.

I

Though there is a note of solemn authority in the voice of the Master as he speaks to this church, he is still very tender and very complimentary. You will notice that when he has something especially sharp to say he prefaces that criticism by all the words of commendation that he can honestly utter. That is sound psychology. The best English teacher I ever had was

at times sharply critical. He had a way of tearing my themes into shreds. But always he would find something good even in my worst efforts. Therefore, though I often went away humbled and chastened, I also went away hopeful. His criticism was never purely destructive. Thus John, speaking in behalf of his Lord, begins by saying all the beautiful things about this church that he can find to say—and some are very beautiful. Let us glance at the spiritual treasures that are in its possession.

1. The first treasure he mentions is one of priceless worth. "I know thy love." He finds here the glow and the warmth that he so sorely missed in the vigorous and active church at Ephesus. This church had kept alive its first love. It still had that holy passion without which the individual, without which the Church as a whole, ceases to be Christian. "I know thy love. I know I still have a place in your hearts. I know you are passionately devoted to me, and, loving me, you love your brother also." What a high commendation! None could be greater. If Jesus can say that about you and me, whatever may be our defects, we are still in possession of the distinguishing mark of a disciple. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

2. As Jesus reads the hearts of the saints that compose this church, he discovers also the precious treasure of faith. Now faith is another absolute essential for the genuine Christian. It stands at the very en-

trance to a life of fellowship with Christ. There is no becoming a Christian without it. There is no pleasing God without it. "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Faith is that by which we live. "It is written, The just shall live by faith." If Jesus, as he reads your heart, can say, "I know your faith," you are to be congratulated. You are in the Kingdom. You are a child of the King.

3. The third virtue possessed by this church is patience. "I know your patient endurance." Jesus sets great value upon patience. It is one of his own conspicuous characteristics. Patience means, as indicated in a previous sermon, power to wait for a hoped-for good, and power to endure. Jesus was good at waiting. He could wait thirty years before entering upon his ministry, a ministry in which so much had to be accomplished in so short a time. He was patient with his blundering friends, patient with the slow spread of his Kingdom. Then, how patiently he could suffer! When we wish to see patience at its highest and best, we turn not to Job, very impatiently cursing the day he was born, but to Jesus Christ. To be patient, therefore, is to be Christlike. He could suffer. It is in our patience that we are to win our souls. And these people were possessed of patience. It was a patience that was born of love and faith. If we love and if we believe, we can wait, and we can suffer.

4. This church is still rendering a high service. Hence the Master can say, "I know thy ministry." That is a beautiful word with music in its voice and healing in its hands. This ministry was especially helpful in that it was born of love. Love is, in itself, a service. Our hearts grow warmer and our resolutions firmer when we know ourselves loved. But love is active. It is aggressive. It will do the big thing if it has an opportunity. If not, it will do the small and insignificant. It will give largely if it can. If not, it will give the two mites of the widow. It will send a bouquet of rare orchids if it is within its power. If not, it will bravely offer a field flower. But where there is love, there is always a gracious and healing ministry.

5. Then as the very crown of all, this is a church that is growing in usefulness. "I know," said Jesus, "that your works are greater now than they were at the first." They are greater because they have a greater motive power behind them. This church is growing in love and faith and patience. Therefore it is becoming more and more active and useful. Here, then, is a church that is making progress. Many of those composing its membership are becoming more gracious and helpful with the passing of the years. They are becoming broader in their sympathies, warmer in their hearts, richer in their enthusiasms. Year by year, they are working more earnestly, giving more liberally, proclaiming their compelling gospel with a greater fire and passion. Thus, growing in

love and faith and patience as a motive power, the church is going forward from victory to victory under the leadership of her Lord. This is a commendation indeed.

II

But in spite of so much that is commendable about this church as a whole, there was one criticism. On account of its too blind tolerance, it was being threatened by a very grave danger. Some of its members had already been ensnared, and had lost their faith and love and patience. Others would soon suffer a like tragedy if the evil that was making inroads upon the spiritual life of the church was not put away. What was wrong? Listen: "I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess." The one fault, then, that Jesus has to find with this church is that it is tolerating a certain woman who claims to be a prophetess. It is listening to the teaching of a woman who falsely claims to be God's spokesman. Who this woman was, we do not know. She was no doubt a member of the church. She may have been the pastor's wife. The marginal reading is: "Thou sufferest thy wife Jezebel." She is spoken of here as "the woman Jezebel." Of course, that was not her real name. That name was given to indicate the kind of woman she was and the influence she had upon those who came in contact with her. She was a "Jezebel of a woman," as Moffatt translates it.

Now most of us know something of the historic Jezebel. She was not a Jewess. She was the daughter of the king of Tyre and Sidon. But though a foreigner, she married a Jewish king, Ahab. She brought with her into Israel her pagan religion. She was a worshiper of Baal. She is the worst-hated woman in the Old Testament, the Lady Macbeth of the Bible. Jehu calls her "this cursed woman." The very hatred that she aroused is an indication of her strength. We do not hate weaklings. We may despise them, but our hate goes to the strong. Her strength is further indicated by the fact that she fairly swept the court—and, with the court, all Israel—off its feet religiously. Here, for instance, is the greatest prophet of that day upon his knees. These are the tear-soaked words that burst from his broken heart: "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." You will doubtless remind me that things were not quite so bad as the prophet thought, that there were yet seven thousand that had remained true to God. But surely the situation was bad enough to indicate that Ahab's ill-starred queen had gone far toward turning the nation completely away from God.

Such, briefly, is the story of the historic Jezebel. It is easy to account for the tragic ruin that she wrought in Israel. In the first place, she was a woman whose loyalty to a false faith had led to a bad character. She

was a notoriously evil woman. Second, she was a woman highly placed. She had all the powers born of a royal position to help her in her work of ruin. Finally, she was, as indicated before, a woman of vast ability. She was brilliant, dashing, and daring. She was possessed of a fiery zeal in the spreading of her false faith. That would have been highly commendable in a good cause.

Now since this prophetess was a Jezebel of a woman, she, too, was the possessor and preacher of a false faith. She was doubtless as false in herself as the faith she proclaimed. She was bad in character. She was doubtless Jezebel-like also in her position. The fact that she was a prophetess gave her a place of honor. If, in addition, she was the wife of the pastor, that would have made her position more honorable still. Finally, she, too, was a woman of ability. She no doubt was Jezebel-like in her daring, her fiery zeal, her power "to win friends and influence people." Here, then, was a woman who was threatening to work the ruin of this church as Jezebel had wrought the ruin of Israel.

What was the teaching of this prophetess? Just what heresy did she propagate? We are not told. She herself gave her false doctrine a very catchy and seductive name. She called it "the deep things." How charming!—especially to shallow souls who long to be thought profound. "Deep things"—that smacks of the highly intellectual. It caters to our conceit. It reminds

us that between us and the moronic masses there is a great gulf fixed. It is, therefore, especially appealing to intellectual topwaters who wish to be thought wise. But this deep doctrine had a yet stronger appeal. It catered to self-will. It made sin at once seductive and harmless. It made adultery the same as love. It made the law of sowing and reaping applicable only to fools who were not wise enough to know "the deep things."

This is not reading into the story what is not there. While confessing that we do not know just what this woman taught, we do know the effect of her teaching on those who took it seriously. "Yet I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and by her teaching leads astray my servants, so that they commit fornication." Thus her teaching put to sleep watchfulness against wrongdoing. It anesthetized the conscience, destroyed sensitiveness to sin. It opened the door to utter moral and spiritual disaster. So far the church as a whole had not yielded to her teaching. Its sin was in being blindly tolerant of a teacher thus false.

III

What does Jesus have to say to this church? His word is one at once of solemn warning and of tender appeal. In speaking of this false prophetess, he is stern indeed: "I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication." What an awful declaration! How fraught with pres-

ent and future doom! The historic Jezebel had refused to repent, and her life ended in ghastly tragedy. But no tragedy could be more terrible than that of this woman. "She willeth not to repent." She has become fully committed to evil. She has locked arms with her own ruin. She is married to her sin. Nobody would have a right to speak like this but Jesus. Even he could say nothing more fraught with tragedy. For to lose one's yearning after goodness and after God, to lose all desire to repent, surely that is the very hell of hells!

But the church itself he calls to repentance. Those who have been led away from the faith are to come back. Those who have been merely tolerant are to repent of their too easy indifference toward evil. To those who have refused to give ear to the seductive voice of the prophetess he says, "I cast upon you none other burden." God's message is spoken of again and again in the Scriptures as a burden. Thus in saying "I cast upon you none other burden," he means, I take it, "I give you no other revelation than that which you have already received."

This does not mean, of course, that God spoke in the long ago and speaks no more. It does not mean that there is no new light to break from his Word. God spoke in the historic yesterday; he speaks today; he will speak tomorrow. But he does mean that we are not to give an uncritical ear to every new teacher that comes. The need of our day is not for a

new gospel. We constantly need a new and fresh interpretation of the gospel that is ours. But we need no higher revelation than that which has been made to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Any teaching that minimizes Jesus does not belong to the deep things of God, but to the deep things of Satan.

To those who repent. Christ gives this twofold promise. I take them in their reverse order.

1. "I will give him the morning star." The "morning star" is none other than Jesus himself. "I am the bright and morning star." Therefore those who repent are to receive into their hearts Jesus himself. But there is special significance in this name. The times were out of joint. The days were dark. Bitter persecution was for many putting out the sun. But they who receive Jesus receive the Light. They receive that Light that is the prophecy and promise of the dawning of a new day. He was the one sure hope for a better tomorrow for the Christians of Thyatira, as he is for us. They, receiving the Light, were to give light to others. They were to be heralds of hope for a despairing world.

2. The next part of the promise is this: "To him will I give authority over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers." This seems at first glance to smack of physical force. But Jesus tells us that the power we are to receive, the authority that is to be ours, is like that which he received from his Father.

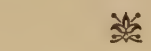
How constantly were those who came into contact with Jesus impressed by his authority! When they went away from hearing him preach, they said with voices of awe and wonder, "He taught as one having authority." When they saw the wonders that he worked, they declared that with power and authority he commanded unclean spirits and they obeyed him. What was the nature of this power? It was not physical; it was spiritual. It was fundamentally the power of genuine goodness. This power is offered to all those who repent. It is offered to you and me. May God help us to claim it!

IX

THE DEAD CHURCH

"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

REVELATION 3:1



AT THE TIME OF THE WRITING OF THIS LETTER, Sardis was an old and well-known city. It had long been famous for its commerce and wealth. Here Croesus had reigned, that Croesus with whom the plutocrats of twenty-five centuries have been compared. Sardis was also famed for its strategic position, for it was built upon an elevation that was defended on three sides by sheer cliffs. On the fourth it was approached by an isthmus so narrow that a handful of men might have defended it against thousands. It was therefore considered impregnable. In spite of its impregnability, however, it had been captured more than once. But always it had fallen through sheer carelessness, through overconfidence, through allowing its very strength to become its weakness.

This letter is one of unmixed condemnation. That is very startling. For the poor rich church at Smyrna our Lord has nothing but words of praise. There is no single hint of condemnation. For the churches at Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira, he has some words of warmest praise. There was much in all these churches that he could command. The letters to them, therefore, are a mingling of praise and of blame. But to the church at Sardis he has no good word to say. It is true that there were a few in the church who had remained loyal. Those he commends, but to the church as a whole he can speak no word of praise. This is surprising, especially in view of the reputation that this church enjoyed.

I

What was the reputation of this church?

As we read between the lines we can see that this was a well-known church. If you had asked any pagan on the streets of Sardis for the location of this church, he could doubtless have told you at once. That is good. It is a bad sign when the citizens of our city do not know where our church is. I believe the church ought to haunt the people by the fact of its presence. I believe in advertising the church. I believe in advertising it by speaking of its services and of its work. I believe in newspaper advertising. I believe in advertising by earnest and aggressive Christian living. The

membership of the church of Sardis has lived in such a fashion as to make their church known.

Not only was this church well known, but it was favorably known. It had a reputation for the best commodity in all the world—life. "Thou hast a name," says the author, "that thou livest." They called it "The Live Church." What a glamorous name! A live church is the most fascinating thing in the world. There is a charm and power about such a church that no other organization can possibly possess. There is nothing else so winsome as life.

> "'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
> O life, not death, for which we pant;
> More life, and fuller, that I want."

The fact that this church had a reputation for life means, doubtless, that it once really possessed life. It certainly means that it was carrying on all those activities that are characteristic of a live church. The folks that belonged to it thought well of it. They thought so well of it that they attended it and gave liberally to its support. That is good. Very few churches suffer by being held in too high esteem by those who belong to them. One of the most common tragedies of our day is the low estimate in which the average church member holds his church. For whenever a church is held in contempt by its own members, it is sure to be held in contempt by the community in which it is located. When it is despised by those who belong to it,

it will most certainly be despised by those who do not.

But this church was so honored by its membership, its services were so well attended, it put through so many activities that it had a reputation for life. Had you been moving from Ephesus to Sardis, your pastor would perhaps have given you a letter of commendation to this church. He would have said, "That is a live church. By all means put your membership there." Had you been spending a Sunday in Sardis, you would doubtless have attended this church. Its reputation for life would have made it impossible for you to stay away. But having attended, you likely would have been a bit disappointed. You would have felt that in spite of all appearances there was something wrong. For this church was not living up to its reputation.

II

What was wrong?

The church at Sardis was not ringed about by enemies as was that at Smyrna. Certain of the members of the latter church had had to pay for their faith by the laying down of their lives. But such was not the case with this church. Then, certain of these churches were being troubled by false teaching. Some of them had a few noisy heretics among their members. Then in the church at Thyatira Jezebel was making a lot of trouble. But this church, so far as we can see, was utterly free from heresy and from all in-

ternal strife. It was also free from strife from without. Nobody was persecuting this church.

What, then, was the matter? The worst possible —the church was dead! "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." That is the supreme calamity. Life is beautiful; life can laugh, and love, and sing. But death is the supreme ugliness. I remember a hymn I used to hear as a boy that I am glad we do not sing any more. It runs like this:

"Ah, lovely appearance of death,
What sight upon earth is so fair?
Not all the gay pageants that breathe
Can with the dead body compare.

"With solemn delight I survey
The corpse when the spirit is fled,
In love with the beautiful clay,
And longing to lie in its stead."

How utterly false and morbid! I have never had any such longing; neither have you unless there is something desperately wrong with you. When Jesus said, therefore, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead," he was saying about the worst that he could possibly say.

We can now understand why this church was not being persecuted. We make war on the living, not on the dead. Sometime ago a young chap made a slighting remark about a certain minister. A friend re-

buked him saying, "You ought to have more respect for him than that." "Respect!" he answered with considerable heat. "I do respect him. I always respect the dead." We can see why this church was far worse off than one torn by internal strife. To be plagued by heretics may be bad, but it is not so bad as to be dead. The keeper of a morgue said to a visitor, "That is a bad cough you have." "Yes," came the reply, "but any of these chaps lying about on these slabs would be glad to have it." Death, I repeat, is the supreme calamity.

III

How did this church come to die? Suppose we hold an autopsy and inquire into the cause of its death.

The first fact we discover is that it was not killed by outside foes. The truth is that it is next to impossible for outside enemies to kill a church. I have never known a single church to come to its death through the efforts of foes that fought from without. In the early days of Christianity when that vigorous faith began to shake the whole city of Jerusalem, the Jews set themselves to the task of destroying the Church, and failed. When later on the Roman Empire girded on its mighty sword for the same purpose, it met a like result. Not only so, but three centuries later the Church had so triumphed that the Roman eagle was displaced by the Cross. Outside foes seldom if ever destroy a church.

This church died through the death of its individual

members. A church lives only as its individual members live. That is true of all other organizations. We have often forgotten this in our preaching of the social gospel. We have seemed to believe that we could build a Christian society out of un-Christian men. This is just as impossible as it would be to build a sound house out of rotten timber. It is as impossible as it would be to have a harmonious orchestra composed of members who could not play. Sardis was undertaking this impossibility; it was trying to make a live church out of dead members.

Some years ago, a friend of mine, a minister who was given to doing eccentric things, is said to have told his congregation that their church was dead. Furthermore, he said that he proposed to preach its funeral sermon on the following Sunday. At the appointed hour he had a casket placed in front of the pulpit, and proceeded to deliver the sermon. At the close, he said: "Now, some of you may not agree with me that this church is dead. That you may be convinced, I am going to ask you to view the remains. I want you to pass by the casket, one by one, and see who is dead." In preparation for this he had had a mirror placed in the bottom of the casket. It is evident, therefore, what everyone saw when he came to view the deceased. I do not believe this ever happened, but I am sure that such would have been a fitting procedure for the church at Sardis.

But how did these individual members come to die?

It was surely not of deliberate purpose. There was no definite and open break with Jesus Christ. Emil Ludwig calls attention to the fact that Bismarck at a certain particular date ceased to pray, and that at a certain given time he left off all religious observances. That sometimes happens, though not often. Such is not the case here. This congregation had not met and passed a resolution saying: "Whereas we have found that we have been following cunningly devised fables, and whereas we have found that the promises of Jesus Christ are not to be taken at their face value, be it resolved that from this hour we renounce all allegiance to him and to his church." Few of us die of set purpose.

Neither did the members of this church die because they found themselves in a moral desert where spiritual life was impossible. This is proved by the fact that there were those in this very church who were beautifully alive. There were those whose lives had not withered, but who had remained green with the vitality and freshness of an everlasting springtime. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." These were a heroic remnant. They were the few among the many, the unspotted among the spotted and sin-soiled, the living among the dead. In spite of all hindrances, these were athrill with life because they had kept in touch with Jesus Christ, the life-giver. Why then, I repeat, had this church died?

As we read between the lines we can, I think, dis-

cover the cause. Earlier in their career by being alive they had won a reputation for life. Everybody came to think well of them. Not only so, but they came to think well of themselves. They were sure they had arrived. Then more and more they became content with themselves. More and more they undertook to live upon their reputation. Then they erected a beautiful building on the corner of Self-satisfied and Complacency Streets, where they went quietly into the sleep of death. Thus this church was taken captive as had been the city in which it was located, through a too great self-confidence. Overconfidence is a familiar road to defeat. How many a game has been lost by overconfident players! How many a church has died while congratulating itself on its abundant life! Thus this church came to its death.

Not only had it died, but it had done so without being conscious of the fact. That is a calamity that takes place all too often. What happened to this church may happen to you and me. Samson lost God without at first being aware of his tragic loss. When danger threatened, he rose up with his old confidence saying, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself." There had been a time when his every effort ended in victory. To shake himself was to bring his foe to disastrous defeat. But it was not so this time. To his utter horror, he found himself as weak as any other man. Expecting victory, he went down in defeat. "He wist not that the Lord was departed from

him." We may be in touch with our Lord today and lose him tomorrow. Not only so, but we may lose him without at first being aware of our loss. Mary, "supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey." How far have you traveled on a supposition?

IV

Now what has Jesus to say to this church, with its living and its dead?

1. The living. Notice first what he does not say to the living. He does not tell this little handful of living saints to come out from among the many dead. That is a course the living are sometimes tempted to take, but it is a cowardly course. When I was pastor in Washington, a young woman came to tell me of a deeper religious experience into which she had just entered. She then said that she was going to quit her own church that she might join a little group of like-minded souls who were more congenial. I raised no question as to her sincerity; I think she was genuinely earnest. I raised no question as to the reality of her experience. But I did question the use she was making of this experience. In fact, I felt quite sure that she was making a mistake. If your church is dead, that is all the greater reason that you should stand by if you have life. To withdraw and seek for an easier place smacks of sanctified selfishness, however high the motive you may claim for such conduct. These live saints were to stay in their place and be true.

2. But what has Jesus to say to the dead? Does he have anything to say? He does. He has hope, even for those who have ceased to live. Do you remember that solicitous father who was fairly tugging at Jesus in an effort to hurry him to the bedside of his little girl? She was so very sick, so very close upon the gates of death! Soon it would be too late. But in spite of all his frantic urging Jesus was too slow. Messengers come from the home. They blurt out the brutal truth. "Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?" Why indeed! Death puts a period to everything. At least that is the case with us. But it is not so with Jesus. He turns eagerly and confidently to this brokenhearted father with this bracing word, "Be not afraid, only believe." The father, thus encouraged, held to his faith, with the result that he soon had his child, alive, in his arms again.

Our Lord is equally hopeful in regard to this dead church. His introduction is intended to show his complete adequacy to its need. "These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." "The seven Spirits of God"; that means the Spirit of God in all his manifold perfections. Jesus claims to be the giver of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Life. Jesus holds also the seven stars, the pastors of the churches, the membership of the churches. That is, in one hand he holds the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver; in the other he holds this church, he holds you and me.

He is longing to bring our emptiness into contact with his fullness. He is yearning to enable every one of us to say with John, "Of his fulness have all we received."

What is necessary in order for this dead church to live? It must repent. It is to repent, not by giving up its activities. These are good as far as they go. The church is to continue to meet for worship. It is to continue to pray and to give. All these things are proper and necessary. The church is to repent not by giving up its activities, but by putting reality into them. "I have found no works of thine perfected before my God," are the words of Jesus. Their activities have been all right as far as they have gone, but they have not gone far enough. They have been inadequate and incomplete.

Consider worship, for instance. It is good to worship, but worship is a failure unless it brings us into the realization of the living God. Prayer is the highest of privileges, but it is an exceedingly imperfect thing unless through it we open the windows of our souls until they are flooded with the divine Presence. Serving and giving are good, but they are incomplete unless they have in them something of the spontaneity of life. The works of this dead church were not perfected, just as the fruit on a branch that has been torn from the parent stem is not perfected. The need of this church, therefore, was not to give up its activities, but to make contact with the Source of life. This they were to do by repenting.

And what does repentance mean? It means a change of mind that leads to a change of direction. In their complacency they had lost their Lord. They were to come back to Him who has come that we may have life and have it in abundance. He has all the life there is. "He that hath the Son hath life." And remember that if we have life, everything in a measure is possible. Milton had no eyes, but he had life, and therefore he wrote poetry that the world will never let die. Beethoven had no ears, but he had life, and he wrote music that will live forever. We may miss many a prize, but if we let Jesus into our hearts we win the supreme prize—that is, life. He gives life that satisfies today, and that will satisfy through eternity.

X

THE CONQUERING CHURCH

"I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."

REVELATION 3:8

WERE IT MY PRIVILEGE TO GO BACK ACROSS THE years and attend a service at one of these seven churches, I think I should choose the church at Philadelphia. Then, should I have the further privilege of choosing at just what particular service I should be present, I should select the one at which the pastor read this letter that we have for our present study. I should desire to be present at this particular service because I am confident that it was one of surpassing joy. How the hearts of the members of this congregation must have glowed; how every face must have lightened as they heard their pastor read these words of warm commendation! I am sure that not one who had the good fortune to be present that day ever forgot it. They must have spoken of it through all the remaining years

of their pilgrimage with tenderness and with tears. Here, as in the letter to the church at Smyrna, there is no word of condemnation. There is nothing but praise, praise even more full and tender than was given to that rich poor church, surrounded by bitter foes. What a season of refreshing they must have had at that memorable service!

I

In his introduction to this church, Jesus through his prophet, John, makes four distinct assertions about himself.

1. "These things saith he that is holy." He claims to be the Holy One. He is spotless in character. He is one in whom there is no darkness at all. He makes the same claim here that he makes in the Gospels, "Which of you convinceth me of sin!" He confirms the declaration of Pilate, "I find no fault in him." He is without spot or blemish, absolutely perfect in character.

"Oh, what amiss may I forgive in Thee,
Jesus, Good Paragon, Thou crystal Christ."

2. Being holy in character, he is also true in conduct. "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true." Since he is perfect in what he is, he is also perfect in what he does. The tree being good, the fruit is naturally good. The fountain being perfectly pure, the streams flowing out from it are also perfect in

purity. These are the words of him that doeth all things well. "True and righteous are thy judgments." Everything that this Holy One says and does bears upon it the mark of flawless perfection.

3. These are the words of him who has the key of David. The key of David symbolizes kingly authority. Jesus speaks here as a king, or, to put it more accurately, as the King. He is the one who can say, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth." He is the one of whom Peter, speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit, said, "God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ." He is the one whose right it is to have absolute power, to exercise kingship over the individual, over the Church, and over the world.

4. Not only is he King in his position, but he exercises kingly powers—"he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth." That is, not only has he the right to rule, but he does rule. He is no absentee Christ, he is present and actively interested in all the affairs of men. There is absolutely nothing that concerns our world that does not deeply concern him. At times we thwart him through our sin. But he never gives over the fight. Where we give him a chance he changes our very losses into gain. He makes even the wrath of man to praise him. He is not, therefore, one at whose skirts we are to clutch with the desperate hope and prayer that he take a hand in the task of bringing in the Kingdom of God. He is already engaged with all his powers in this high

adventure. It is he, rather, who gives you and me the right to accept his kingship and to co-operate with him in the accomplishment of his purpose to remake this broken and shattered world.

II

Notice, next, the commendation of this holy and true and active King. The heart of it, I think, is contained in these words: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." What is implied in this is that Jesus the King has opened doors for this church, and that it has passed through those doors for the accomplishment of his purpose. Now Jesus is constantly opening doors. He does this for every one of us. There are many to whom life seems very narrow and circumscribed. Some are compelled, at least physically, to be "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd." There are those, for instance, who are never permitted to pass from the narrow precincts of the sickroom. Yet even these have the privilege through Christ of enjoying the wide-open spaces. I met one such person not long ago. She was a constant sufferer on account of some spinal trouble. For long hours every day she had to have a fifty-pound weight suspended from her chin. Yet she was working with eager and nimble fingers. She was earning her living. Not only so, but she was educating a young man for the ministry. And the joy that sparkled in her eyes showed

emphatically that she was singing with the psalmist, "Thou hast set my feet in a large room."

Christ is constantly opening doors for his Church. The doors of opportunity are wide open even in these days of strife and blood and tears. Millions of perplexed and suffering people in all lands are gripped by a sense of desperate need. Naturally these needy people are not at all sure that the modern Church has that which is able to supply their need. But their very heart-hunger, the futility of all their efforts to find a solution to life's problems in any other direction—these constitute an open door for the Church. How many doors stand open for our own church! What Christlike service we may render during the coming days if we are only willing to enter those doors!

But bear this in mind—while it is the work of Christ to open doors before us, it is no part of his task to enter them for us. He cannot. No more can he compel us to enter. Cattle may be herded and driven, but not so with human hearts. It is the work of Christ to open the door. It is ours to enter. If we refuse to do so, we simply shut the door of possibility in our own faces. No one, not even Christ, can compel us to enter these wide-open doors. But thank God, if we are willing to enter, neither man nor devil can prevent us. Nobody can defeat us but ourselves. "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."

The members of the Philadelphian church had passed through the door that Christ had opened, be-

cause they were possessed of those qualities of character that made such triumph possible. The first reason given for their success is this: "Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." These people were loyal to the word of Christ. They were true to his gospel. Now I am not one who in any sense believes in a wooden interpretation of the Bible. I am not one who believes that God spoke long ago and does not speak today. But I am becoming more and more convinced that one of the weaknesses of our modern Church grows out of its neglect, and consequent ignorance of, the Bible. We make entirely too little of the Word of God. Much of our preaching and teaching leaves the wealth of the Scriptures largely unexplored and unappropriated. These people of Philadelphia, however, were faithful in their study and teaching of the Scriptures.

Being loyal to the Scriptures, they were loyal also to the Christ of the Scriptures. "Thou hast not denied my name." It is possible to be a close student of the Bible and yet not a Christian. It is possible to be thoroughly orthodox and thoroughly dead spiritually at the same time. Yet, other things being equal, the chances are that those who are deeply schooled in the Bible will be deeply spiritual. I have little hope for a warm, vigorous, vital Christian experience that is not grounded in a daily feeding upon the Word of God.

The second reason that is given for the success of the Philadelphian Christians in passing through this

open door is that they had only a little strength. "Thou hast a little strength," is the same as saying, "Thou art weak." This church, then, had entered the door that Christ had opened, through its weakness. That sounds a bit surprising at first, and yet it is most natural and reasonable. The man who enters the door of a wider knowledge does so because of his sense of ignorance. The one who is convinced that he already knows, will never learn. Here is a great saint who is telling us of those times when he is especially strong. "Then," he says, "am I strong. Then my weak hands are possessed of the lifting power of a Samson. Then my shoulders become broad to bear the burdens of a spiritual Hercules. Then am I strong." When are his periods of strength? Here is the answer: "When I am weak, then I am strong. When I realize that it is not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord, then do I become possessed of power beyond the human."

When I was a student at Webb School, it was my privilege to know rather intimately a young man who was the best personal worker that I have ever met. He was easily the most influential boy in school. He has since become a minister. His success, however, has not been conspicuous. He has held no great churches. But all over the land there are those who have been won to Christ through his personal touch. In a moment of confidence he told me this bit of his own experience. One day he was going to assist a

certain minister in a revival. He was going, not as a preacher, but as a personal worker. "I am glad you are going to have Raymond as a personal worker," he overhead an older minister remark to the man he was going to help. "He is invincible." Invincible! That word laid firm hold upon his mind. It put a new spring in his step. It fairly made him swagger. At the very first service when the invitation was given he turned, in a cocksure fashion, and spoke to the man beside him. He received only a cynical smile. He stepped back to the next man, with a like result, and then to the next. He was working his way toward the door. Finally, he spoke to one sitting on the last seat in the church, with no better results. "Then," he said, "I plunged out into the dark, ran down into the woods, fell upon my face and sobbed out my confession before God, and died to my invincibility."

It was when this church was weak that it was really strong. The same is true of ourselves. Do you know how long we are going to be without the power of God upon our lives? Just so long as we are content to be without it. When our weakness breaks our hearts, when we truly thirst, then only shall we come to him and drink. It is those who are faithful to the Word and Person of Christ and who lean on him for strength, that pass through the doors that he himself opens for them.

III

How rich are the promises that our Lord makes to this church! Of course these promises look to the life to come for their complete fulfillment. But all of them are in some measure fulfilled in the here and now. I am persuaded that there is no experience waiting for us in the afterlife that we do not know in some measure in its incipiency in the life that now is. What is the reward of entering Christ's open door? This above all: every door we enter opens for us a yet wider door.

1. Those entering the open door find a growing likeness to Christ. "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, and my new name." Name, of course, stands for character. To have written upon you the name of Christ is to share his likeness. Back among the hills of my native state I used to meet now and then some rugged old backwoodsman who would look me over and say, "Aren't you Bill Chappell's son?" "Yes," I would answer. "I knew it. I can tell by the favor." Then often he would add, "If there's anything that I can do for you, let me know. Your father was my friend and one of the best and straightest men I ever knew." And when the members of the Sanhedrin looked Peter and John over, "they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." There was a family resemblance that was unmistakable.

Then there shall be upon us the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem. There is a certain city

in the United States whose inhabitants speak with a peculiar accent. It is often possible to recognize one of its citizens by this accent alone. "We are a colony of heaven," said Paul. Therefore, as a Christian, your speech ought to betray you. There ought to be that in your very bearing, in your brotherliness, in your courage in the face of danger, in your peace in the presence of confusion, that proclaims to the world that you are a citizen of that new Jerusalem that cometh down from God out of heaven. This is the privilege of all who enter through Christ's open doors.

2. Jesus promises to these his keeping power. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee." Of course our Lord longs to keep every one of us. There is a sense in which he does keep us. But naturally the fullness of his keeping is only for those who put themselves in his hands. Electricity serves those who obey its laws. Christ keeps those who, by keeping his word, allow themselves to be kept. There is nothing arbitrary about this. Generally speaking, he keeps those in health who obey the laws of health. Even so he keeps those spiritually who obey the laws of his Kingdom. This promised keeping is for all times and for all circumstances. It is for the life that now is. It is for that which is to come.

What a privilege is this! No wonder Peter breaks into this joyful shout: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively

hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." Of course this keeping does not mean that we shall never be subject to temptations, that we shall know no tears, nor trials, nor conflicts. Sometimes fiery furnaces will have to be endured. But when our Lord does not see fit to keep us from the fiery furnace, he will, if we trust him, keep us in the midst of it. That will be even better.

3. He promises to these victorious saints a growing usefulness. He promises to make of the conqueror a pillar in the temple of God. The Church of Jesus Christ, as you know, is not built of wood and stone and steel. It is built out of human stuff. "I will build my church," said Jesus. And when he builds it, he does so with "living stones," faulty men and women like ourselves. He is the chief cornerstone; but every regenerated man, every regenerated woman, is a part of this spiritual temple. Every one of us fills a place without which there must be something lacking. Jesus builds his Church of us. He also builds his Church through us. Every saint is a church-builder.

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar." Notice it is "pillar" and not "pillow." There are some who would like to have pillows in the church. There are others who do not need them—they can sleep well enough as it is. But the word here is "pillar." A pillar

supports something. It helps to hold the church up. There are two classes of people in this church, those who lift and those who lean; those who help to support it, and those who have to be supported. I am not saying that the Church would go to pieces without you and me, but what I do say is that if the Church is to accomplish its work in this generation, it must do so through us. There is no other way.

Then the word "pillar" carries with it the idea of steadfastness, of constancy. In fact, this is the very heart of the meaning of this promise: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of God, and he shall go no more out." A pillar is always in its place. One who is a pillar does not support his church on Sunday and let it collapse on Monday. He does not support his church at the communion table and let it fall down at the ballotbox. He does not support his church at the hour of prayer and allow it to topple into ruins by shady business deals when prayer is over. He does not support his church at home and wreck it when he is away in a strange city where nobody knows him. He is constant and steadfast in his loyalty and devotion.

Finally, a pillar is an ornament. A pillar is not only a thing of strength, but a thing of beauty also. The people who belonged to the church in Philadelphia probably knew something of the beauties of Greek architecture. They had been privileged to look upon magnificent Corinthian and Doric columns, and

had doubtless felt the spell of their beauty. But there is no beauty so winsome as the beauty of holiness, nothing so full of charm as genuine goodness. These steadfast supporters of the church were fascinating folks. It was this that gave them their conquering power.

"I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and do thee reverence, and to know that I have loved thee." How was that amazing miracle to take place? Surely not through any physical compulsion. Physical force is frailer than a gossamer thread in the presence of such a task as this. These foes were to be made into friends by the beauty of the lives of the members of the church. Beholding their courage, their steadfastness, their Christlike winsomeness, they were going to long to know their secret. What a rich and full promise! Happy the church, happy the individual, that thus enters the door that Christ has opened! To do so is to find ever-increasing Christlikeness, and an ever-growing usefulness.

XI

THE DISGUSTING CHURCH

"Because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, before long I will vomit you out of My mouth."

REVELATION 3:16 (WEYMOUTH)

THE TEXT IS FROM THE LAST OF THE SEVEN LETters to the churches of Asia; it is directed to the church of Laodicea. This letter reaches a climax of denunciation. For the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia the author has nothing but words of praise. For the other churches his letters are a mingling of condemnation and commendation. Even in the dead church at Sardis he finds a few members to commend. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." But neither for this church as a whole nor for any of its members does he have one single word of praise. Instead he administers about the sharpest possible rebuke. "You are lukewarm," he declares. "You are neither hot nor cold;

before long I will vomit you out of my mouth." This does not mean that the Master has lost all patience with this disgusting church. Had such been the case, he would have left it alone. He rebukes it because he still loves it and hopes for it. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." This letter, therefore, marks a climax both of condemnation and of patient and appealing tenderness.

I

What is wrong with this church? Why is it so harshly condemned? Had you visited the city of Laodicea, you would have found a progressive and prosperous city. Had you attended the church that was located there, it is almost certain that you would have found nothing in it to fill you with a feeling akin to loathing. Since Laodicea was a city of great wealth, it is highly probable that the church had in its membership many well-to-do people. In all likelihood it had a handsome building, a good choir, a cultivated minister. But in spite of this the church was possessed of an attitude that to Jesus was most objectionable. For this reason he said to them about the sharpest word of rebuke that he could possibly utter.

What, I repeat, was the matter? Had the members of this church become open and flagrant sinners? By no means. Had they given over the fight and made an abject surrender to the enemy? Persecution was

abroad. Soon this church along with others was going to have to fight for its hunted life. Rome was bent on its complete destruction. Had it decided for this reason to play safe by simply ceasing to function as a church? No, that was not the case. This church was still carrying on. Of course it is a tragedy when any group of professing Christians give over the high quest upon which they were once engaged. It is sad when a single individual turns from the church that he once loved. But this is a tragedy that takes place again and again. There are thousands at this moment gathered for worship in the different churches of our city. For this we are grateful. But we cannot but think with sadness of other thousands who were once as eager and active as ourselves who are no longer with us. These have not become antagonistic. They have simply lost interest. Their course is especially hurtful, because they proclaim by their own conduct that, knowing what the Church has to offer, they regard that offering as not even worth the taking. But the position of this church at Laodicea was even worse than that.

But how could it be worse? Was its membership made up of a bunch of Quislings who in the face of danger had made common cause with their foes? That would have been a horrible show of cowardice and of treachery. We find it hard to forgive the friend that turns foe, even when the motives for such turning are the highest possible. Why did the Pharisees hate

Paul so fiercely? Why were they so bitter in their persecution that they were constantly seeking to destroy him? It was because they looked upon him as a turncoat and a traitor. One day he had set out from Jerusalem to Damascus with a commission from them to destroy the church; but instead of persisting in his purpose, he began to proclaim the faith that he had once sought to destroy. His former friends could never forgive him for that.

But the charge brought against this church is one even more hurtful than that of going over to the enemy. What, then, was wrong? It was this: these people, in spite of their claims to discipleship, were lukewarm. They were tepid. They were straddlers. They were sitters on the fence, hitters of the middle of the road. They were flabby, flaccid, half-hearted. They had no earnestness, no zeal, no enthusiasm. They were contentedly paddling about in the shallows of Christianity, having neither the courage to renounce it altogether nor to venture out into its great depths. "I hate men that are half and half," says a psalmist. Jesus does not hate such men, but he loathes their attitude. In fact, it is evident that there is nothing to which Jesus is so utterly antagonistic as the attiude of listless, tepid, cautious half-heartedness. Therefore he said, "I would thou wert cold or hot." Any attitude is better than that of being lukewarm.

II

Why does Jesus hate lukewarmness?

1. He hates it, in the first place, because the man who is half and half is the hardest of all men to reach. Of all the difficult people to win to discipleship, the most difficult is the one who bends to every breeze, the one who takes the middle of the road, the one who always agrees with the last man who speaks to him.

Do you know the hardest object for a bullet to penetrate? You might think it is a piece of plate steel, but if you do you are mistaken. I have a friend, a physician, who is a big-game hunter. While in his home one day, I examined the rifle that he used while hunting in Africa. To look at, it was little more impressive than a .22 rifle, but it was very heavy and had tremendous driving power. This physician told me that a few days before, he was coming home from a hunt with a friend. They saw a plow point fixed upon a stump about a hundred fifty yards away. "I'll bet you can't hit that plow point," said the friend. At once the physician accepted the challenge and shot. The dust kicked up some thirty yards beyond, and the friend said, "You missed it." "All right," answered the physician, "you try it." The friend shot, with the same result. "You missed it too," said the physician. But when they reached the plow point they found two holes through it. The bullets had hit that plow point with such terrific impact that they penetrated it as if it had been made of paper. But I can tell

you something that would stop a bullet even from that gun. That is a bank of snow. Shoot into that and the leading snowflake will meet the bullet at the door and travel with it down the street. As it does, it will gather its friends until the bullet will surrender and give over the fight, not because the snow is so hard but because it is so soft. The most difficult man with whom to deal is the flabby, half-hearted man.

What is true of the individual is true also of the group. What is the most difficult audience with which any speaker has to deal? Naturally it is not the audience that is enthusiastically for the speaker and for the cause for which he stands. To speak to such an audience is a thrill. Nor is the most difficult audience the one that is utterly antagonistic. The audience that fights back, the audience that will have none of the speaker nor of his message is at least alert and alive. Such an audience puts the speaker on his mettle and makes it possible for him to give his best. But there is an audience that is as smothering as a wet blanket and as stifling as a dust storm. That is the audience that is neither hot nor cold. That is the audience that says listlessly, "I have heard him before," then puts on its shock absorbers and prepares yawningly to suffer through to the end.

2. Jesus hates lukewarmness because it strikes the deathblow to our highest usefulness. This is the case, in the first place, because such an attitude tends to paralyze effort. How many tasks have we fumbled simply

because we did not bring our best effort to them! How many times have we explained our failures by saying, "I did not half try!" In my school days one of our chief pastimes was wrestling—we called it "wrastling." There was one big husky chap that anybody could topple into the dust—not because he was weak, but because he would not try. This explains numberless failures, both in things that matter little and enterprises of vast importance. We miss our best in school, we fail to achieve our best in our home, in our church, in our world, so often because we only half try!

In a recnt book, *Falling Through Space,* a young English aviator tells of taking a crew to Germany a short time before the outbreak of the present war, to compete in a boat race. This crew had to make the race in a borrowed boat. Seemingly from sheer carelessness they got off to a bad start. After that they made such a poor showing that by the time they reached a bridge that was the halfway mark they were five boat lengths behind. The spectators were jeering at them. As they passed under the bridge, one of the spectators even made the mistake of spitting on them in contempt. That was a fatal blunder. The lagging oarsmen shed their indifference like a garment. They bent to their task with all their might. The result was that they carried the trophy with them when they went back to England. They did so because they got in earnest.

Since halfheartedness paralyzes effort, it loses many

a game that is of little importance, but it loses other games of supreme importance. What would our Army be worth in dark days like these if the soldiers should say to their officers: "We are willing to wear the uniform. We are willing to draw our pay and eat our meals. We are willing to take the proper amount of sleep. We are even willing to drill, provided the weather is not too hot nor too cold, too wet nor too dry. We are willing to march, provided it is not tiresome. We are willing to fight, provided we have a safe place and the enemy does not press us too hard." Such an attitude would change the best army into a worthless rabble.

Then, lukewarmness lessens our usefulness not only because it paralyzes our effort, but because it robs us of our charm. If you want to be the most uninteresting creature in the world, just refuse to be interested. If you want to bore everybody, then study how to be bored. Of all the unattractive people, I think the listless, lukewarm creatures are the ones that take the prize. There are some people who do not have enough enthusiasm to shake hands. Did you ever shake hands with anybody who was so flabby that if you did not do all the shaking, there would be no shake to it? "I like him," we often say of another, "he is so full of life." "I like her. She has so much enthusiasm." But who ever heard anybody say, "I like him because he is as flabby as a wet towel and as limp as a dead fish"?

Therefore to have no earnestness is to deny ourselves

one of the greatest secrets of charm. It is our business as Christians to win others to Christ. But how can we do this? It does not take vast cleverness. It does not take vast ability. It does require genuine earnestness. I wonder if in all the centuries a single soul has been won to the Master by a professing Christian who was totally lacking in enthusiasm. A listless, half-hearted church is about the most uninteresting thing in the world. But there is nothing more fascinating than a church that shares in the passion of her Lord.

It is said that in a certain village in Tennessee there was an old chap who posed as an atheist. He never went to church. During the services it was his custom to sit in front of one of the stores and whittle and talk theology to those who were willing to listen. But one night the church caught fire. There being no fire department in the village, the people had to do their fighting with a bucket brigade. It happened that Uncle George, the atheist, found a place at the head of the line. He was the man whose business it was to dash the water onto the fire. He was working at his job manfully when the pastor came by. "Hello, Uncle George!" he greeted him. "This is the first time I ever saw you at church." "Yes," was the answer, "this is the first time the church was ever on fire." No wonder Uncle George came! A building on fire will always bring people out. A man on fire is the most compellingly interesting thing in the world. To be listless, then, is a big step toward being useless,

because such an attitude at once paralyzes effort and kills winsomeness.

3. Finally, Jesus looks upon lukewarmness on the part of professing Christians as disgusting because these indifferent ones, of all others, most grossly misrepresent him. The heart of Jesus was the hottest that ever beat in a human bosom. Many fiery souls have blessed our world, but none was so fiery as he. He was so desperately in earnest that his disciples said in awed wonder as they looked at him, "The zeal for God's house has burned him up." He was so earnest that rather than compromise he alienated the enthusiastic crowds that thronged him during the early days of his ministry. He was so in earnest that even his mother allowed herself at one time to be persuaded that he was mad. He was so in earnest that he went to the Cross while the springtime of life was yet fresh upon him. There may be many times when we misrepresent our Lord, but we never do this with such tragic fullness as when we claim to be like him and yet are lukewarm and halfhearted.

III

But what has Jesus to say to the halfhearted man and to the halfhearted church? Hard as they are to reach, he has still for them a message of hope. Therefore he makes this appeal: "Be zealous therefore, and repent"—literally, "Be boiling therefore, and repent."

How can lukewarm water be brought to the boiling

point? Not by being poured from one vessel to another. When quite a young preacher, I went to help a brother in a meeting. At the beginning of one of the services, he said, "Before you preach, let me warm them up." Then he proceeded to warm his congregation by trying one trick after another. He set them to milling about and to shaking hands with each other. But when it was all over, I was conscious of no real fire. In fact, the whole procedure was as utterly futile as an effort to boil water over the picture of a glowworm. Such a positive effect as boiling must have back of it a very positive cause. What is this cause?

1. The first step in our passing from lukewarmness to the boiling point is to face the facts about ourselves. That is just what Jesus was seeking to get this Laodicean church to do. Their lukewarmness was a result of their self-satisfaction. Their self-satisfaction was the result of the wide difference between what they thought of themselves and what they really were. Here is what they thought of themselves: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." To their way of thinking, they had arrived. They were just as good, just as useful, as they cared to be. They were facing the dangers of their day with all the gallantry that they desired. They were disgustingly satisfied with themselves.

But what a contrast between what these Christians thought of themselves and what the Lord thought of

them. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that if there is a wretched one, it is you; pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. You say you need nothing. I say you need everything." It is terribly jarring at times for us to face the facts about ourselves. But it is generally the first step toward a new life. We are not likely to send for the physician until we realize that we are sick. We are not likely to seek to know until we realize that we are ignorant. It was when the prodigal faced the facts about himself that he took his first step toward home.

2. The second step in passing from lukewarmness to boiling was for these people not only to see themselves as they were, but also to see themselves as they might be. If these people were pitiable and poor and blind and naked, they did not have to continue as they were. In the place of their poverty they might possess true riches. In the place of their shameful nakedness they might wear the white garment of a stainless life. Instead of their blindness they might see him who is invisible, and we too need to look away from our disappointing selves to the better men and women that we might be. Could we only be made to see our potential finer selves, sun-kissed, sun-crowned, Christ-like, then I am sure that our lukewarmness would fall from us like an outworn garment, and we should be clothed instead with a high and a holy passion.

3. The final and all-inclusive step that these had

to take in order to pass from lukewarmness to the possession of the zeal of the Lord was to let Jesus himself into their hearts. In their self-satisfaction, they had shut the door in the face of Christ. Therefore, in loving humility, he said, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." All that they need he has. Coldness of heart never fails to melt at the rising of the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his beams.

This same Christ is knocking at the door of our church and at the door of our hearts. "Behold, I stand at the door." It is a present fact. "I am now standing at the door and knocking. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." If you here and now open the door of your heart, Christ will come in as host and guest and change your winter into spring. Not only so, but through you he may get his opportunity at the whole church, for in order for Christ to get into a church it is not necessary that every member open the door. If only one will open, he will get his chance. God grant that there may be a welcome for him in all our hearts.

XII

THE WAITING GUEST

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

REVELATION 3:20

TO THE HEARING EAR THIS IS A WONDERFULLY thrilling text. It thrills us, in the first place, because it takes us by surprise. We find it in a book that clashes with conflict, that shakes with the thunders of battle. It is a part of a letter that is unusually harsh and severe in its rebuke. To find this tenderly beautiful text, therefore, is a bit like finding a lovely flower blooming in a desert. It is like hearing a mocking-bird sing during the bleakest days of winter. The Christ of the Seer of Patmos seems at times little akin to the Christ of the Gospels. But here we find accents as winsome and as tender as any to be found in all the New Testament. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock."

Then this text thrills us, if we really believe it, because it is such amazing good news. It tells us that Christ has come our way, that he is even now at our door. It may be that you can hear such news with a shrug. It may be that you can greet it with yawns. But if such is the case, it means that you do not really believe it. It means that familiarity has dulled its cutting edge. When I was quite a young pastor, a friend called me one Saturday and told me that a representative of one of the best-known churches in our denomination was out scouting for a pastor, and that he would be in my congregation the following Sunday. Naturally I was thrilled. I would have been even more thrilled if I had known some of the amazing consequences ahead. But here is a word infinitely more thrilling. "Christ has come your way. He is now waiting at your door."

I

What does this tell us about our Risen Lord? It tells us that he is still on the same quest that in the long ago brought him to this world. When he summed up his mission, he said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." That is his mission still. When he was here, he made his appeal to all sorts and conditions of men. The mass of people heard him gladly. Little children struggled to get into his arms. The outcast and the desperate came to him as their one hope. Scholarly graybeards sat at

his feet, as did Nicodemus, in the realization that he had a secret that they themselves did not know and of which they stood in desperate need. As he sought then, he seeks today.

Not only is Christ still seeking, but he is seeking aggressively. The first move toward your salvation and mine, the first move toward the salvation of every man is made by Christ himself. He always seeks us before we seek him. We often think otherwise. We often fancy that we are earnest seekers after Christ and that he somehow eludes us, holds us at arm's length, will not let us into the secret of his Presence. But such is not the case. He is the eternal Seeker. Yesterday and today he is doing his infinite best to win his way into your life, to be your friend, to share with you his very Nature.

In his eagerness thus to share, he does absolutely all within his power. He stands at the door and knocks. If you desired to get into my home, that is all you could do. That is all he can do. He is no gate-crasher. He has infinite reverence for your personality. He will never override your will. He never enters where he is not made welcome. All he can do before the door of your life is to stand and knock. If you fail to open the door, then this Waiting Guest will never be yours.

A friend of mine told recently of a wealthy bachelor who was a society favorite in one of our largest cities. He belonged to the select Four Hundred. No social

function was complete without him. On one occasion he came to a social function with a stock about his neck instead of the conventional collar and tie. Some were a bit surprised. But as he set the styles, little was said. One intimate friend did dare to ask the reason. "I will tell you," said the society favorite. "I have cancer of the throat. The doctor has given me only sixty days to live." This man was given permission to share his secret with three other of the playboy's most intimate friends.

A little later these four intimate friends of the sick man gave a dinner in his honor. When dinner was over, the spokesman for the group laid a revolver on the table and said, "George, we want you to know that we think you will be perfectly justified in taking the shorter and painless way out. We thought it might be a little easier for you if you knew your friends approved." But the playboy surprised them. He thanked them graciously and said, "Yes, I have thought of that. But you know, I have a social code. This is part of it. I never break in on any society uninvited. I will not do so even with the society of the dead." There was something fine about that. He was a gentleman. Certainly the Infinite Gentleman is not going to break in on your life uninvited. All he will do is to stand and knock.

But you may say a bit peevishly, "He never knocks at my door. Don't you know that as wretched as I am, as empty and futile as my life seems—don't you know

that if I really believed that the Christ of God is knocking at my door I would let him in? No, he may have knocked at yours. He may have knocked at the doors of the great saints, but not at mine. I have never had such an experience in all my life. Had he ever knocked at my door, should he knock now, with what infinite eagerness I would let him in."

But in so saying you are entirely mistaken. When Jesus says, "I am now standing at the door and knocking," he is stating a plain fact. His knocking is a part of the experience of every human soul. There is no single exception. Before your mother's lips kissed you, he was there. All through the changing years he has been closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet. Sometimes he has seemed more insistent than at others. But always he has been on your track like the Hound of Heaven. Always he has kept up his tireless quest after you. Always he has been the Good Shepherd seeking the sheep that is lost.

II

But if Jesus knocks at our doors, how does he knock? He does so in an infinite variety of ways. By every method that divine ingenuity can contrive he seeks an entrance into your heart and mine. Let me name a very few ways in which he knocks at our doors and makes his presence known.

1. He knocks through our failures and through the tragic suffering born of these failures. A man came to see me sometime ago who had made a mess of his life, and knew it. Through the days of his young manhood, he had recklessly toyed with an evil habit. He was aware that that habit had enslaved many of his fellows, but he was equally sure that it would never enslave him. But its bonds had tightened little by little until now he knew himself a slave. "The trouble with me," he said, "is that I have no inner reserves. As long as I talk to you I will stand, but I know that as soon as this conversation is over, I'll turn back to my old slavery." God was knocking at his door through a sense of his own wretchedness and helplessness.

I met another man who felt no sense of slavery at all, but life had grown as stale upon his lips as bread made of ashes. He saw no meaning in life. Once he had dreamed of being and doing something worth while. But something happened. He felt that a Christian friend had let him down; so his zest had gone. He was bored, fed up, greeting the fresh opportunities of each morning, not with enthusiastic joy, but with sleepy yawns. Christ was knocking at his door through his boredom.

Some time ago I went to preach at one of our largest city churches. At the close of the service a woman asked for an interview. She told me her story. It was a wretched story. She had broken her home. She had become alienated from her husband and her

children. But instead of blaming herself, she seemed to blame everyone else. She was utterly poisoned by hate. She had allowed it to wreck both her physical and her spiritual health. A little later she slipped into an untimely grave. But all the while the Infinite Christ was knocking at her door, longing to change her defeat into victory, her hate into love.

2. Then, Christ knocks at our door through the vision of our better selves. One day as he stood on the banks of the river Jordan, he saw a blundering fisherman coming his way. As he looked at him, he saw not only the man that he was but the man that he was capable of becoming. "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona," he said with enthusiasm: "thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." Simon never forgot that word. Always he must have seen out ahead of him the gallant-hearted, Christlike man in whom Jesus had made him believe. When cowardice had made him afraid even to acknowledge the master that he loved, when he had fallen into utter shame, he could not despair. He went out and wept bitterly, hating himself for the thing he was, but still tormented by the possibilities of the man that he might become. So Christ is knocking at your door.

Of course, if we refuse to respond, if we continuously shrug his arm from off our shoulders, if we persistently stop our ears to his knocking, we can settle down into some kind of content. That is one of life's greatest dangers. That is what our fathers

meant by the sin against the Holy Spirit, the sin that has no forgiveness. The only sin that God never forgives is the sin of refusing to accept forgiveness. It is the sin of persisting in a wrong course until we lose our desire for forgiveness. There is far more tragedy than humor in these lines from one of our Oklahoma poets:

"I think my soul is a tame old duck,
Dabbling around in barnyard muck,
Fat and lazy with useless wings.
But sometimes when the North wind sings,
And the wild ones hurtle overhead,
It remembers something lost and dead,
And cocks a wary, bewildered eye,
And makes a feeble attempt to fly.
It's fairly content with the state it's in,
But it isn't the duck it might have been." [1]

3. Then, Christ knocks through our sense of inadequacy. He disturbs us by the realization that comes to us sooner or later if we are really earnest people that in our own strength we cannot realize our better selves. From generation to generation, through all the centuries, every man seems to have to learn for himself of his inability to save himself. We look at our Lord and see in him how life ought to be lived. We see in him the vision of our possibilities. But when we set out to attain, if we struggle in our own strength alone, we meet little other than persistent defeat.

[1] From *Level Land,* by Kenneth C. Kaufman. Used by permission.

This is not the experience simply of the weak. It is the experience of the strongest of mankind. Here, for instance, is a great and earnest man named Paul. He has had a vision of that better self that God makes possible. But when he has sought to realize it, he has failed. He has looked wistfully toward the heights and tried to climb, but he has failed to attain. He has looked to the depths and shuddered, and yet has found himself gravitating toward the depths. The resulting torture was so great that it wrung from his breaking heart one of the bitterest cries ever uttered, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" Paul found the answer. He found it in God through Jesus Christ. That is where we can find it.

Christ knocks at our hearts not only through our inadequacy, our inability to *become* our best, but also through our inability to *do* our best. Every unspoiled soul longs to be useful. Our Lord is constantly knocking at our doors through the needs of others. At times we are all like that embarrassed host of whom he himself tells. This host had a friend who came for a visit when it was midnight. When he went to prepare a meal for that friend, he found his larder absolutely empty. Then what? He thought of another friend who could help; so he went to knock at his door. This done, he appealed to him with this word, "A friend of mine in his journeying has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him."

Ours is a world of desperate need. Children have

come into your home. Maybe you have lost interest in the Church. Maybe you have broken with religion. But you had a religious upbringing. You realize that in spite of the fact that you have not been entirely loyal to the faith of your fathers, that faith has undergirded you with something that you would like to put into the hearts of your children. For this reason thousands of earnest fathers and mothers are being forced to seek a bracing religion. This they are doing not so much for their own needs as for the needs of their children. Thus, through the needs of our homes, through the needs of our church, of our city, and of our world, Jesus Christ is knocking at our door.

Finally, he is knocking through every precious memory of our better yesterdays. He is knocking through the voice of his Word when we give it a chance to speak to us. He is knocking even through the appeal of the minister. In a thousand ways, by every means that infinite ingenuity can contrive, the Christ of God is seeking to enter into your life. He is seeking to make it possible for you to experience with Paul "the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you." He is seeking to enable you to shout with this great apostle, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." You may have the Risen Christ for your very own guest if you will.

III

But if this tells us that Christ is still a seeking Christ, it tells us also something about ourselves.

1. It tells us that we are grand creatures, in spite of our selfishness and sin. If we are sons of Adam, we are also sons of God. We are capable of entering into friendship with our Lord. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" He is God's own child. God is mindful of him. God does visit him. God offers him his friendship hour by hour and day by day.

2. This word tells us that if Jesus Christ becomes our guest, it must be through our own choosing. We have touched on this before, but we cannot emphasize it too much. We are so prone to believe we are willing while our Lord is not. But such is never the case. The only way God can ever save any man is through that man's consent. Jesus told the story of a certain shepherd who counted his flock at the close of the day and found that one sheep was missing. At once the shepherd left the ninety and nine and went in search of the one lost sheep until he found him. When he found that sheep, he did not ask him whether he preferred the wilds of the mountains to the fold. He did not ask him anything of his loyalty to the shepherd himself or to the other members of the flock. Without a question, he put the sheep on his shoulder and carried him home by sheer force.

But when a son was lost, while the father grieved,

he did not go into the far country and bring the son home by force. The son had to come of his own choice before he could find his place at the feast of the fullness of life. Then there was another son who had a chance at the feast, but we read of him this tragic sentence: "He was angry, and would not go in." Then what? Did the father go out and collar him and drag him in? No, instead he went out and entreated him. That was as far as he could go. When the son persisted in his refusal, he suffered a punishment hotter than the hottest of hells. He missed the feast. If we refuse to open the door, whatever may be our reason, then we will miss having as our guest the Christ who is our one hope for time and for eternity.

IV

How, then, shall I have this Christ as my guest? The answer is very simple. All I have to do is to open the door. I do not have to entreat him to enter. I do not have to lay violent hands on him. I do not have to buy his entrance by my work or my prayers or my tears. All I have to do is to open the door. As the light bursts through the window when I lift the blinds, so he enters when I open the door. And what is it to open the door? Do not stifle a yawn and say that you have heard it before. I know you have. But it contains a fundamental truth that is as old as the sun, but as new as the sunlight that looked through the gates of the morning this day. To open the door is to be

willing to obey Christ at any cost. It is to say, "Not my will, but thine, be done." It is to give to him that something that we are most loath to give—our very selves.

To put your life in God's hands is something so important that all else without it ends in failure. It is so important that, however great our handicaps, to achieve it is complete victory. What a charming personality was the Rich Young Ruler! He had everything in his favor—wealth, youth, culture, moral earnestness, religion. But when Jesus said, "Follow me," we read of him this tragic sentence: "He went away." He had everything except a willingness to surrender, and he lost. Here is another man in a bad setting. His life is all tangles and knots. He is a tax collector. He is despised by every respectable man and, I have an idea, by himself as well. But when Jesus passed Matthew's way and said, "Follow me," we read that he rose up and followed him. He had nothing to give but himself. He gave that and won. Thus, when Jesus knocked, the outcast opened the door, while the prince shut the door in his face. Which will you do?

XIII

DESTROYING THE DESTROYERS

"The time has come .... for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

REVELATION 11:18 (MOFFATT)

THE TEXT IS A VOICE FROM HEAVEN. JOHN HEARD it, and it met a ready response in his own heart. He rejoiced in this voice, not because he was vindictive, but because such a voice was an indication of the righteous reign of the Risen Christ. Since his holy Lord was on the throne, every force that made for destruction was to be destroyed. Naturally John was thinking especially of the Roman Empire. He was thinking of that strong and cruel nation that had waded through slaughter to the dominion of the world. He was thinking of that wild beast that was even then engaged in destroying the Church. But now at last this destroyer was to be destroyed. Ruthless Rome was to be paid in her own coin.

DESTROYING THE DESTROYERS

I

In declaring that the destroyer will be destroyed, John is speaking in harmony with the Bible as a whole. One prophet after another makes this declaration in his own way. The author of the Book of Numbers puts it in this fashion: "Be sure your sin will find you out." Of course your sin will hurt others. It will help to lower the moral temperature of the world. It may even become known to all that know you. But whatever happens, whoever may be hurt, of this you may be sure: your sin will find you out. Isaiah declares, "Strong men shall become like tow, their idols like a spark, and they shall burn together in a blaze that none can quench." By this he is affirming that a man by his sin destroys himself. Sin may burn others, but it will burn its perpetrator to utter destruction. This is Isaiah's way of joining his voice with that of the Seer of Patmos in saying, "The time has come . . . . for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

Paul puts the same thought in this familiar word: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." This is an ordered world. The man who sows the seed of destruction will surely reap a harvest of destruction. That is also the verdict of Jesus. He puts it in this fashion: "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Life is an echo. As you speak to others, so they speak to you. If you mete

out helpfulness to others, helpfulness will come back to you. If you mete out destruction to others, destruction will be your portion. Jesus is thus declaring this grim truth: "The time has come . . . . for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

Not only does the Bible make this declaration, but it illustrates the truth of it in story after story. Here, for instance, is a king named Ahab. He comes home one day in a pout. When his wife Jezebel asks the reason, he tells her that Naboth has refused to sell him his vineyard. Jezebel promises to look after the matter for him. Upon receiving this promise, Ahab is content. Things begin to happen at once. Before long wild dogs are lapping up a bit of blood. It is the blood of Naboth. Ahab has won the prize. But he has won it at the price of the destruction of another.

Then what? Other days go by. And now Ahab is going out to battle. He goes in disguise, fearing for his safety. All day he fights without a wound. Then a certain soldier, who perhaps has only one arrow left, puts it upon the string, bends his bow, and shoots at no particular target at all. "And a certain man drew a bow at a venture." But the arrow does not go wild. Instead it strikes an unintended mark. Ahab's knees grow weak. By evening he is dead. Again the dogs are lapping blood. It is rich, royal blood. It is the blood of Ahab. And the destroyer has been destroyed. In one fashion or another, the Bible abounds in such stories. So does history. So does experience.

II

Who are the destroyers?

1. There are those that destroy aggressively. I am thinking of nations and of groups. There are nations, for instance, that prey upon their own subjects, that destroy the weaker ones within their own borders. I am thinking of France before the outbreak of the Revolution. Here might crushed right. Here splendor rode hard upon the bony shoulders of squalor. The nobility laughed and quaffed and said, "After us the deluge!" The deluge came. It was a deluge of blood and tears. In the language of Dickens, "Humanity long crushed down grew up at last into that distorted monstrosity known as the guillotine." Thus the destroyers were destroyed. France in a sense bleeds from that black wound to this hour.

We read the same story in the Russia of the Czars. That nation had much about it that was beautiful. But the weak were made to suffer at the hands of the strong. By and by, as so often happens sooner or later, the weak rose up and destroyed the strong. You can read the same lesson in our own tragic past. The United States as a nation became guilty of the sin of enslaving helpless men and women. This was not the sin of only one section of the country. It was the sin of the nation as a whole. By this cruel injustice we in a measure destroyed those that were weaker than ourselves. With what result? We in turn suffered our measure of destruction. We paid for it among

other treasures by the lives of a million able-bodied men.

Then there are those nations that prey upon other nations. More than one such is stalking its way in blood across the world even now. Today we face strong outlaw peoples that are out to win the wealth of others by murder and pillage. None of our great nations is entirely guiltless. National morality is of very recent origin. It has not been long since every nation was in a sense a beast of prey. Practically every nation that is alive today once felt that might made right. This was even more true in the distant yesterday. It is not surprising, therefore, that there have been nations that have lived in large measure by the destruction of those weaker than themselves. These have fattened off the wealth of others. In fact, strong outlaw nations have been through the centuries one of the major curses of our world.

As there are nations and groups that destroy aggressively, so there are individuals. There are individuals that destroy themselves. Some do so by dissipation. I am thinking now of a young man I knew as a boy. He was about the finest physical specimen I have ever known. But in spite of his amazing gifts, he died in his early thirties. He died thus early because he was his own worst enemy. As if greedy for the wrecking of his fine body, he threw himself among the swine of the far country with abandon. He destroyed himself by the sins of the flesh. Others take a more decent

method. They destroy themselves by giving way to emotions and passions that tear life apart, such as guilt, fear, and hate. All about us there are those who destroy themselves.

There are individuals who aggressively destroy others. We have men who seek to live at the expense of others. Sometimes these do so by their chicanery. They are tricksters and cheats. Sometimes they seek to live at the expense of others by taking to the highway. We think of the John Dillingers, the "Pretty Boy" Floyds—that crop of gunmen that have been destroyed one by one because they persistently sought to destroy others. There are those, therefore, both nationally and individually that are aggressive destroyers.

2. Then there are those that destroy passively. They destroy not so much by what they do as by what they fail to do.

Take our own nation, for instance. There is no mistaking the fact that we have our part in the guilt of what is going on in our world today. A friendly critic said to me sometime ago, "You could not say some things today that you said when you were crusading for peace." "Perhaps you are right," I answered. "But there is one thing that I said then for which I need not apologize now. In those days when war seemed so far away, in those days when many in places of leadership were saying, 'America first!' and were feeling that all we had to do was to live within our

own borders and let the rest of the world settle its own problems—in those days I said, 'We are a part of the world. We are bound up in a bundle of life with other nations. Either we are going to help the rest of the world make peace, or we are going to help the rest of the world make war.' " We refused to help to make peace. Therefore, we are now sharers in the destruction that is wrecking our world.

As we can destroy passively as a nation, so we can as individuals. In fact, it is the type of destruction that we have most to fear because it seems so innocent. In order to destroy your home, you do not have to bomb it. All you have to do is to neglect it. In order to destroy your boy, you do not have to teach him the ways of evil. All you have to do is to let him alone. The sin of the priest and the Levite was not that they stopped beside the wounded man and tore from him what little shreds of clothing the brigands had left. Their sin was that they passed by, did nothing at all, merely left him to die. To do nothing to help heal the world's open sore is to become a destroyer.

III

How and when is the destroyer destroyed? His destruction does not always take place spectacularly. Nor does it always come immediately upon the heels of his sin. There are those who feel that because the destroyer is not destroyed at once he is not going to be destroyed at all. "Because sentence against

an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." The destroyer may get away with his destruction for a long time. The nation that lives as a beast of prey may go from victory to victory. But the final end is always defeat.

"I have seen the wicked in great power," said a certain psalmist—"I have seen the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green tree in its native soil. But one passed by, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." The first look at the powerful wicked is not enough. In order to know the facts, one must pass by and take a second look. How vastly impressive is the first look at Babylon! But when we pass and look again, there is only a heap of ruins. John had seen Rome in great power. But now as he looks again, lo, it is on the point of passing away. The destroyer is about to be destroyed. Today we see a mighty nation whose bloody foot is upon the neck of Europe. But I am perfectly sure that it will not always be so. Our text, yes, and all history tells us what we are going to see when we pass by for a second look. Though the destroyer is not always destroyed immediately and spectacularly, he is always destroyed.

There are times, however, when this destruction takes place spectacularly and in conformity to exact poetic justice. Here is a story told by Robert Ripley. When Russia was beginning to crumble near the close of the first World War, a certain soldier with a com-

rade managed to steal a chest of gold that was to be used in paying off the army. These robbers succeeded in hiding their treasure by taking it to the bank of a certain river and tossing it into its muddy waters. Then the leader, fearing that his comrade might expose him, or being unwilling to share the treasure with him, shot the man dead and threw his body in with the chest of gold. Years later, when the war was over, the government of Poland, seeking to gather in all the gold, made to its citizens this proposition: If anyone knew where gold was hidden and would disclose it, he would be given half the treasure with no questions asked.

It was then that this soldier came forward. The treasure was located, and an enclosure was built about it. While the water was being pumped out, the chest became visible with the skeleton of the murdered soldier standing at its side. As the water fell away a finger of one of those skeleton hands fell upon the trigger of the gun that stood at his side. The gun was discharged, and the murderer was shot to death. That indeed is an amazing story—one that lays a heavy tax on our credulity. "Such a thing would not happen once in a billion!" we are ready to say. Quite true. Yet it would have a better chance of happening every time than the destroyer would have of escaping any time.

Here is a story almost equally spectacular, but on a far larger scale. The empire of Sennacherib is hang-

ing like a threatening storm cloud over the little city of Jerusalem. This king sends a letter to king Hezekiah, urging him to submit without a fight. This letter is full of sanity and common sense. In it the bullying tyrant warns Hezekiah not to be so foolish and fanatical as to look to God for deliverance. "Have the gods of the other nations been able to deliver them?" he asks convincingly. "Look where my armies have marched like a devouring forest fire and swept everything before them. Take warning and do not play the fool."

But Hezekiah, instead of yielding, went in and spread his letter before the Lord. He seems to have said, "Lord, here is a letter that came to me today. It was addressed to me, but it was really meant for you. It says that you can no longer help. But I am putting the case in your hands." He had hardly risen from his knees before the prophet Isaiah came to tell him that because he had prayed the enemy should not come near the city. Instead the destroyer was destroyed in a most spectacular fashion. Byron celebrated that destruction in one of his best known poems, beginning, "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold."

But generally speaking, the destroyer is destroyed by what we call natural law. Of course natural law is the law of God. The destroyer is destroyed because he breaks himself against God. Destructive men are often destroyed by their fellows. But always they suffer an

inner destruction. As with the individual, so with the nation! The victors of one day have a way of becoming the victims of the next. Conquering peoples often die of their own conquests. It may be hotly disputed whether or not the meek will inherit the earth. But there is one fact beyond dispute—the non-meek are not going to get it permanently. Every destroyer will inevitably be destroyed. That operates as surely as the law of gravitation. It operates as certainly as the law of sowing and reaping. Such destruction is now taking place before our very eyes. The nations of the world are even now bent on destruction. Even now also they are being destroyed.

IV

How shall we avoid this tragic role? First, let us face again the terrible cost of it.

Years ago, when I was a boy, a husky lad came to visit me. He was two years older than I, and in a wrestle I had little chance. But I told him that if I could not throw him down, I could hold him down. This he hotly disputed; so we put the matter to the test. Here I made good my boast. But I did not do so by standing erect. I had to pay a good price. Sometimes I was on top, much of the time on the bottom. I would not have stood a chance had I not got down with him. This is only an illustration of the truth uttered by Booker T. Washington: "The only

way to hold any man in a ditch is to get down in the ditch with him."

While Huey Long was in power in Louisiana, a leading lawyer of that state told me this story. A client of his who felt himself greatly wronged by Huey Long had made up his mind to kill him. But before carrying out his purpose, he consulted this lawyer. My friend did not undertake to dissuade the would-be killer on moral grounds. He simply put this question to him, "Do you want to kill your enemy badly enough to be killed? That is certainly what it will cost you. Remember he has a bodyguard. You would have no chance of escape." The result was that the deed was never done. The destroyer did not wish to destroy greatly enough to be destroyed.

You remember Samson, the pathetic blind giant. One night he was taken into the temple of Dagon to make sport for his enemies. During a rest period this enraged and humiliated man asked to be taken to where he could lean upon the pillars that supported the building. He fingered these for a brief moment. Then, bowing himself with all his might, be brought the building crashing upon his enemies. Many of them were crushed to death, but Samson was crushed also. That too is a parable. When we bring down any crushing ruin upon another, it never fails to crush us. The playing of the role of the destroyer is therefore very costly.

A second realization we need, if we are to avoid this

role, is that we must do something more than merely swear off. The only way to keep from being a destroyer is to be a builder. The only real foe of any vice is the bringing in of its opposite virtue. The only way to eliminate darkness is by the bringing in of light. The only real foe of selfishness is unselfishness. The only real foe of hate is love. The only real foe of death is life. For any individual, institution, or organization, therefore, to live, that individual, or institution, or organization must put into life more than it takes out. It is only as we build up others that in a true sense we build up ourselves. As we bear one another's burdens, we lighten our own.

I am indebted to another for this story. It is said that in a vast banquet hall there sat a great company that no man could number. The table before them was spread with the daintiest of food. Everyone present was desperately hungry. But it was the law of the banquet that they had to use the instruments in hand. The only instrument was a fork so long that it was impossible to reach their mouths with any bit of food they picked up. Therefore they sat with anguished faces. They glared at each other with cruel and bitter eyes. They could not feed themselves and no man fed his neighbor, and that place was hell.

But there was another banquet hall equally vast. In this hall there were tables spread with all the dainties that heart could desire. These too were under the same laws that governed those in the first banquet hall.

They had to eat with the instruments furnished. Their forks were also too long. No man could reach his mouth with a morsel. But one of them, as he looked across at his hungry neighbor, said, "Just because I can't eat is no reason to starve you. I'll feed you." And the man that was fed began to feed another, and by and by every man was feasting, and being fed by his brother. And that place was heaven.

You can make either a heaven or a hell for yourself in the world that now is. To take the way of selfishness is hell. To take the way of self-giving is heaven.

XIV

HOW THEY WON

"They have gained the victory .... because they .... did not shrink even from death."

REVELATION 12:11 (WEYMOUTH)

THE TEXT IS THE CONCLUSION OF ONE OF THE weird visions in which this book abounds. It is needless to try to explain this vision in all its details. A war breaks out in heaven between the forces of good and evil. The forces of good are led by the archangel Michael; the forces of evil, by the Dragon who represents, according to the author's own interpretation, the Devil or Satan. The Dragon is overcome, and is cast down to earth. Here he continues the conflict no longer against the angels but against the saints, against the Church of Jesus Christ. Here again the outcome for the forces of evil is the same. We read of the saints this bracing sentence: "They have gained the victory."

Now "victory" is a word that thrills. Everybody longs to win. If we play even the most trifling game, we prefer to come out victors. This is all the more true when the conflict is a matter of life and death. We are interested in those who win the battle rather than in those who lose. If you do not believe this, go out tomorrow to tell your friends how you struck out and lost the game. You will not be half through your story before those friends turn from you to listen to some man with a sparkle of joy in his eye tell how he won. We all wish to win. And the glory of this story is that it points the path of victory for every one of us.

I

How did the saints win? "They have gained the victory because—" What was the cause?

They did not win because of their superior numbers. They were the few among the many. The Church has never won its great victories because of overwhelming numbers. The saints did not win because of their wealth or their high social position. They possessed none of these things. They did not win because of their influence. They were very short on influence. They did not have enough to keep out of dungeons and jails, to save themselves from persecution and death.

If they did not win the victory because of their numbers and their influence, no more did they win because God sheltered and protected them and saw to it that they got through the difficulty without conflict. God

seems never to have been interested in giving his children an easy time. When Jesus was having his last prayer with his disciples, this was his petition: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." That is: "I am not asking that they be taken to the skies on flowery beds of ease. I am only asking that the world be kept out of them so that they may be true at whatever cost."

The other day a father said proudly, "I am going to see to it that my boy does not have as hard a time as I have had." But the chances are that he is going to cheat the boy of the very thing that helped to make the father as good a man as he is. It is never to the easy situations that we turn to find our heroes. A soft south breeze may be good to sleep under, but we need rude north winds to lash us into being our best. These are trying and difficult days for the Church. But real Christianity has never been a hothouse plant. It burst into blossom on a skull-shaped hill called Calvary. Since then it has known its greatest vigor and beauty in the midst of opposition that threatened its very life.

Why, then, did these saints overcome? Three reasons are given, but they may all be summed up into one reason. "They have gained the victory," says John, "because of the blood of the Lamb and of the testimony which they have borne, and because they did not shrink even from death." This last is the all-inclusive reason.

They gained the victory because they were willing to pay the price of victory. They won because they did not try to strike a bargain. They did not argue about terms. When they saw the article that they desired, they did not haggle over the price until the fair was over and the day was done. They won because they regarded victory as of such supreme worth that they were willing to give anything and everything, even their lives, in order to gain it.

II

Now it is this grim determination that is balked by no cost, that goes furthest toward gaining the victory in every situation and in every age. A certain highly successful man makes the bold assertion that if we fail to get from life what we desire it is for one of two reasons—either in our heart of hearts we did not desire it, or we did not desire it enough to pay the price. This, of course, is not absolutely true. It assumes that all of us can do anything or win any prize upon which we set our hearts. It assumes that we are speaking the truth when we say, "I can do anything that anybody else can do."

But this is not the case at all. There are a thousand prizes that I might like to win that are forever beyond my reach. When I used to hear John McCormack, I was convinced that he had the sweetest voice that it had ever been my privilege to hear. But it would have been sheer madness for me to have said, "I want to

sing like that, and I *am* going to sing like that." Such singing could never be within my reach. It would be little short of madness for me to say as I listen to Fritz Kreisler, "What an artist! I too am an artist. I am going to play as well as he plays." There are endless beautiful goals that we might like to reach that are beyond us. Nevertheless, we can go far further in winning life's worthy prizes than most of us are willing to go.

1. Consider physical health, for instance. This body is the house in which I live. If this house of mine is threatening any day to topple into ruins, naturally I cannot render the service that I might render under more favorable conditions. There is in this state a one-time palatial home that is known today as Goat Castle. What was once a poem has become a ruin inhabited by goats, because those living in that house either could not or would not keep it in repair. I am thinking of one who by taking the easy road of self-indulgence has changed a poem of a body into a ruin. But there are others who take the opposite course. Theodore Roosevelt is an outstanding example. As a youth he was a weakling, but he longed for a strong and athletic body. He longed for it so intensely that he actually created it. By this I do not mean to say that everybody could be strong if he would, but what I do say is that most of us could go further in that direction than we do.

Recently I read a story that thrilled me with admira-

tion. In a certain city there was a young woman who weighed 490 pounds. Now that is quite a dainty morsel. But she decided that while iron bars might not a prison make, too much fat would. Therefore she determined to make a break for freedom. She put herself in the care of a physician and lost three hundred pounds. That took courage. I am thinking of a good friend, a little more than five feet in height, who tips the scales at two hundred forty. Now and then we are reckless enough to invite her to dinner. She is always reducing—tomorrow. But today she eats like a little bird—by the peck! She constantly bewails her manifold sins and transgressions, but when she stands up she looks for all the world like a raised umbrella. The prize of physical health may not be for all of us, but it is for far more than attain it.

2. The same is true of the prize of education. Generally speaking, a practical education is within the reach of every boy and girl today, but not all will to attain it. When I was a teacher, the pupils who came to me might be divided roughly into four groups. First, there was a group made up of those who did not know and who did not care to know. They had no intellectual curiosity. They simply were not interested. There was a second group that was made up of those who already knew. I could not show them anything because they had already seen it. They had been born educated. There was a third group made up of lovable souls who would have liked to make a hundred on every

lesson. They would have rejoiced to carry a perfect mark to their delighted parents. This they would have done every time if such a prize could have been won by merely rubbing a book on the side of their heads just before retiring at night. But while they desired to know, they did not desire deeply enough to work. Then there was that fourth group who not only desired to know, but desired to know strongly enough to give themselves to the task of knowing. These were the ones that won.

3. This is also true of our vocations. There are those who never take their work seriously. Instead of taking the hard way, they seek an easy short cut. This is a danger that threatens all of us. I am thinking now of my own profession. I know ministers better than I know any other group in the world. Generally speaking, I am convinced that they are about the finest body of men I know. But in spite of the fact that it is our privilege to say humbly and yet gladly, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach," most of us do not take our jobs seriously enough to give our best. I am convinced that ninety-five per cent of us are not preaching half as well as we could.

I am thinking now of a brilliant and gifted young friend who is enjoying a ministry of more than ordinary success. But in spite of this, I am sure that he is accomplishing only a fraction of what he might accomplish. So I recently dared to give him this shock-

ing warning: "You are capitalizing on your winsome personality and making it a substitute for hard work. If you keep on as you are going, one day that personality will slip from you, and you will find yourself 'letting empty buckets into empty wells, drawing nothing up.'"

But if by being willing to pay the price we can go far toward winning the victory in every department of life, we can be absolutely sure of success in the realm of religion. However small our victory in the eyes of the world, there is an inward victory that is possible for every one of us. When Jesus stood with his foot upon the threshold of death, he said: "In the world ye shall have tribulation." By this he meant that life is a conflict, a battle from beginning to end. He never disguised that fact. "But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." By this he meant, "I have overcome the love of the world. I have overcome the fear of it. I have lived in the midst of its opposition a Victor." That same victory he makes possible for you and me.

What road, I ask again, do we take in order to find it? Look at the road marked by the daring feet of those battling saints of long ago. They gained the victory because they did not shrink even from death. They gained the victory because they put first things first. They gained the victory because they never asked for the easy way, but for the right way. They won because they were willing to give themselves day by day,

even to the extent of parting with life, in order to win. Such self-giving is the sure and open road to victory today and every day.

III

Why is this true? It is not because our God is a harsh and grudging God. It is not because he wants to make things as difficult for us as possible. It is not because he has set certain fixed, arbitrary conditions for our winning the victory. It is true as the law of sowing and reaping is true. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." That is true in the nature of things. Not even God can make it otherwise. Why, I repeat, is this true?

1. It is only through the giving of self that we make it possible for God to give himself. It is only as we are willing to move out of our own hearts that the Eternal God is able to come in. It is only as we are willing to renounce our wills that we can say, "Not my will but thine, be done!" It is only as we give all that we make it possible for our infinitely eager Lord to give all. It is said that when Helen Keller, that deaf, dumb, and blind genius, used to lie in her cradle her mother would come and bend over her and drop her tears on the baby's face as she said, "Oh, Helen, how your mother loves you, and how she longs to tell you of her love, but she can't make you understand! Your ears are stopped and your eyes are closed."

So God is bending very wistfully above you and me

this morning. He is saying, "O child of my heart, how I love you! How I long to give you my very best! How I long to give you my very self, but I can give to you only as you give to me. I can enter your life only at your invitation. Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Remember that God has no plan of salvation for an unsurrendered life. There is no substitute for self-giving. What a beautiful character was the rich young ruler! He had almost everything in his favor —youth, position, courage, a deep hunger and thirst for life. One day he dared in the face of the crowd to run down the road and kneel at the feet of Jesus with this great question on his lips, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus, all eagerness, gave him the answer. "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, take up the cross, and follow me." Then what? Did the young man spring to his feet, all enthusiasm to hurry away to meet the conditions. He did not. Instead we read this tragic statement: "He went away grieved." This was not because Jesus had turned him away. It was not because Jesus had no interest in him. He loved him deeply and tenderly. It was because, while the young ruler yearned for life, he yearned for things yet more. It is impossible to receive Christ except at the price of self-giving. These saints won the victory because by giving all they received all.

2. Then they gained the victory because through

receiving the Infinite Christ into their lives they had something to give. Indwelt by him, they gained the victory through their testimony. There was a power about their spoken word that could not be accounted for except in terms of the Victorious Christ. They were able to speak with authority because it was more than themselves that was speaking. The Spirit of the Living Christ was speaking through them.

Not only did they overcome by virtue of their spoken testimony, but they overcame through what they were. When Peter and John were arrested and commanded not to speak at all nor to teach in the name of Jesus, they answered boldly, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." That is profoundly true. Day by day we give our unspoken testimony either for or against our Lord. Even when these men were silent, those who touched lives with them could not but take knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. They gave their testimony as naturally as a honeysuckle spills out its perfume, as naturally as the waves fling themselves against the cliffs when they have the shoulders of the sea behind them. They gained the victory because giving themselves they received God's best and became God's best.

There is no other way. Whatever may be our advantages, they end in defeat if we try to strike a bargain and seek an easier road. This is the familiar lesson that George Eliot teaches in her great book *Romola*. The central character of the book is Tito

Melema. When he comes upon the scene, he is youthful, promising, and as winsome as springtime. At his presence hearts fly open in welcome. But he has one tragic defect. He fears the difficult. When he stands at the fork of the road, he does not ask which turning will lead to a worthy goal. He only asks which road is easy. That road he takes, with the result that his life becomes full of petty disloyalties and treacheries. By and by he comes to a great crisis. At that time, quite naturally the petty treacheries and disloyalties of his yesterdays become one colossal treachery. He leaves the man who has loved him best and who has dared all for him in what seems like hopeless slavery. He goes away to pursue his own smooth road without a pang of remorse. But his betrayed friend escapes and Tito dies at last with the vengeful fingers of the man whom he betrayed clutching at his throat. But his supreme tragedy is not in his untimely death. It is rather in the fact that his love of ease had strangled his soul long before he fell a victim to his enemy.

Just as the wealthiest opportunities end in tragedy if we take the easy way, so the poorest may end in victory if we are willing to pay the price. As an example of this I cite one of the greatest and best-known Christians in all fiction—Jean Valjean. This ex-convict had had a hard life. Sent to the galleys in his youth for a petty theft, he escaped time and again only to be recaptured and to have his sentence prolonged. At last, brutalized and embittered by almost a score of

years of imprisonment, he was freed. When a kindly bishop gave him a night's lodging, the ex-convict repaid his kindness by robbing him. But when he was arrested the next day with the stolen goods upon him, the bishop forgave him and secured his release. Such treatment was new to Jean Valjean. It was so new that it haunted him. It broke his heart. At midnight of that eventful day he knelt before the bishop's home to take the way of self-giving.

Walking this road, he prospered. He became a successful industrialist. He became a philanthropist. He was made mayor of the city. One day the detective Javert came into his office and said, "My lord Mayor, I desire to be dismissed from the service."

"You desire to be dismissed?" answered the mayor. "Why?"

"Because I have falsely suspected you."

"You have falsely suspected me? In what way?"

"I have thought that you were Jean Valjean, the ex-convict."

"You have thought I was Jean Valjean? Why did you change your mind?"

"I changed my mind because the real Jean Valjean has been found," Javert answered. "He is on trial in a neighboring town and will be sent back to the galleys for life."

At that the mayor dismissed the detective. He then straightened his broad shoulders and said, "At last, at last, that name that has hung over me like a curse is

gone. I can now be free." But all unbidden came the thought of that other man who must suffer in his place. He tried to shut the door of his mind against him, but he could not. The thought of him became a torture. At last this suffering soul drove through the night to the place of the trial. The next morning when sentence was being passed upon his double, Jean Valjean stood forth to confess his identity. He gained the victory because he did not shrink even from slavery and death. This is a sure road for all of us, and there is none other.

XV

FINAL VICTORY

"Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

REVELATION 19:6

THE TEXT IS A SHOUT OF SHEER JOY. IT WAS BORN of the assurance of victory. John heard it in the heavens, but best of all he heard it in his own soul. The shout was that of the heavenly host; it was also that of his own heart.

I

Why is John shouting? What is the secret of his joy? As almost always in a world like ours he is shouting not only *because of,* but also *in spite of.*

1. John is shouting in spite of the fact that he is living through dark and tempestuous days. He is suffering in his own body. A despotic state has robbed him of his freedom. It has shut him up in a concentration camp, in a penal colony, on the Isle of Patmos. But if he suffers in his own person, he suffers more because

of the evil in the world about him. The threat to himself means little in comparison to the threat to that institution that is dearer to him than life—the Church of Jesus Christ.

To the mind of John, this young Church is the one hope of the world. It is the one needle point of light upon the bosom of the vast darkness of that hour. It is the one bit of garden in all that far-flung desert. It is the one bit of life amidst that prevailing death, the one bit of beauty in that widespread ugliness. Rome the beast is bent on the destruction of the Church. Even now Rome the harlot is drinking herself drunk with the blood of the saints. It was John's lot to live through desperate days.

In this respect we are able to sympathize with this Seer of the long ago. It has fallen to our lot to live through trying times. Ours is a day of unparalleled tragedy. There is perhaps more fear, more hate, more despair, more blood and tears in our world today than at any other time since creation. Ours is an evil world. To that almost all are ready to agree. That is the verdict of the saint; that is the verdict of the man of the world. That is the verdict of our allies; that is the verdict of our enemies. We can all agree on this —that ours is an evil time. So desperate has our world become that it would seem as if God were on the point of saying to it in stern judgment, "Depart from me, ye cursed."

2. But not only was John shouting in spite of the

evil of his time; he was shouting because he believed in a better tomorrow. As sure as he was that his world was bad, he was equally sure that it could and would be made a good world. That good world, to his mind, was close at hand. To his keen eye the black skies were already being streaked by the rosy fingers of the dawn. In the desert he could hear the sound of abundance of rain. The bleak winter was already being serenaded by the glad voices of spring. He stood on tiptoe of expectancy, looking for the ushering in of a golden age, of a world where evil should be done away and where good should be made dominant.

Here again we are able to enter into some measure of sympathy with John. For if there is widespread conviction of the evil of our present world, there is also widespread conviction that things can be made better. In spite of the hell that has been let loose upon us, we refuse to give up hope. For what are we praying, struggling, fighting, and dying? For self-preservation in a sense; but a bigger reason is the making of a better world both for ourselves and our fellows. That is true of our allies. It is in some measure true even of our enemies. One of the secrets of the amazing power that Hitler has over his people is just this—that he has led them to believe that he is seeking, and is on the point of making, a better world. It is true that this better world is to be better largely, or only, for the Germans; but it is to be a better world for them, at least.

But how is a better world to be brought about? What is needed in order to change this hell of a world into a heavenly place? To that question we will not all give the same answer. Every nation seems to believe that this better world is tied up with its own individual triumph. John did not look to the triumph of any nation. He did not look to the success of any political or economic scheme to bring in this golden age. He based his hope on the complete kingship of God. The evil world that is, is going to become the good world that ought to be, as soon as God takes up his reign in every human heart and in all human relationships.

In affirming this faith, John puts his finger on the source of all our tragedy. What is wrong with the individual? What is it that makes many a life a great emptiness when it might be full? What is it that is making our world into a highly organized slaughterhouse? Behind our economic maladjustments, behind all our ills is this—man is in rebellion against God. Being in rebellion against God, he is in rebellion against himself; he is in rebellion against his brother; he is in rebellion against life. Life will work when it is lived in conformity to the will of God. It will not work in any other way. John has, then, the only answer. He holds out the only hope for a better tomorrow. It is the kingship of God. "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." He stood amid

the trials of his day unafraid because he was sure of the ultimate victory of God.

II

This is a faith that we need. How can we share it? It is not always easy to believe in the final victory of God. There are times when it is next to impossible. But I have found help through these considerations:

1. God is already reigning. The kingship of God is one of the cardinal and bracing convictions of the writers of the Bible, as of the saints of all the centuries. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice," sings the author of the ninety-seventh psalm. We are to rejoice because a righteous and omnipotent God is on the throne. "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble," sings the author of the ninety-ninth psalm. When he gives the reason for this trembling, it is this—God is holy. A holy God is upon the throne. Therefore every evil thing, every selfish and devilish thing, is doomed. "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all," is the shout of a third psalmist. Isaiah is gripped by the same conviction as he sobs out his confession: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

But this faith in the kingship of God is difficult because we have a conviction that in a world where God

is King things ought to be run far better than they are. We feel this often with regard to our individual lives. God could do far more for us, we are convinced, than he is doing. "Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul," is the impatient cry of the author of the thirty-fifth psalm. "I am deseprate," he seems to say. "I am like a man about to drown. You could throw me a rope with so little trouble to yourself and such great help to me. But you are a mere onlooker." Indeed there are times when God seems either impotent or indifferent. He seems to stand and wait for us to crack up.

Then, if it is difficult to believe in the kingship of God because of our personal problems, it is more difficult still when we look at the international picture. "God is King," I say to a citizen of one of the conquered nations of Europe. But unless he were a man of great faith, he would likely turn upon me in utter indignation. "God King? Then show me some evidences. All I can see are evidences of the kingship of Hitler. Your vague dream of final victory may be right, but nothing is more sure now than that right is upon the scaffold and wrong upon the throne." Most of us at present see few evidences of the kingship of God.

But much of our difficulty grows out of the fact that we do not take into consideration the kind of King God is. While he is a King, he is not a despot. Through the centuries, especially in times of crisis, we

have, in our blindness, demanded a celestial despot instead of a God who is not only a King but a Father. For centuries the Jewish people looked toward the coming of their Messiah King. Some deep-hearted prophets saw him as the Suffering Servant, but that was not the popular view. To the mind of the vast majority he was to be not a Suffering Servant but a celestial despot, a kind of military conqueror. When at last he came not in pomp and splendor, but by way of the manger; when he refused to let them take him by force and make him king; when he repudiated violence, they themselves resorted to violence and hung him on a cross. They wanted a king who was a despot.

There are not a few earnest and devout souls who are expecting Jesus to come back at the close of this age, not the same Christ in character that he was when he went away. They are expecting him to come as a military conqueror. They are expecting him to overpower his enemies by physical force. They cling to the faith that the Christ who repudiated violence and died rather than resort to it, because he had no confidence in the power of force to establish a permanent Kingdom, is at last to reverse himself and depend for his final triumph on the same kind of force as that which is today employed by Hitler. "Why doesn't God kill Hitler?" a man asked me sometime ago in all earnestness. He was impatient that God would not displace an earthly despot by a heavenly one.

Then if God is not a despot, in what sense does he

reign? He reigns in a fashion that is consistent with human freedom. He reigns over man, but he does not coerce him. Were God to destroy evil by force, that same force must also destroy good. Where there is no power to go wrong, there can be no virtue in going right. Man must be free to choose. Since he is thus free, he is constantly making wrong choices. Day by day we ourselves are doing things that grieve our Lord. Day by day we are hanging him upon a cross because of our repudiation of his will. If, then, he permits us to do as we please, in what sense does he reign? He reigns in many senses. Let me mention three:

a) He reigns in that, while we are free to sin, we are not free to get away with our sin. Sin always finds the sinner out whether that sinner is an individual or a group or a nation. Nobody, no organization, ever gets away with anything. We can choose any turning of the road that we please. But having made this choice, we can no longer choose any goal other than that to which our road leads. We can sow either wheat or tares in our field; but having sowed the tares, we cannot reap a harvest of wheat. David chose to sin with the wife of Uriah. What he did not choose was the ugly consequences of that sin, but those consequences were his none the less. God reigns in that no man and no nation ever gets away with a wrong choice.

b) God reigns in that, though he cannot consistently prevent the evil that we do, he is not finally defeated by it. He will not coerce man, but he can and does

coerce evil. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee." When the Jews were offered a choice between the kingship of Jesus and the kingship of Caesar, they chose Caesar. But by that choice they did not uncrown Christ; they only uncrowned themselves. They did not destroy Christ; they destroyed themselves. God took that evil and made of it the mightiest magnet of mankind. Lifted up by their wicked choice, this crucified Christ is destined to draw all men unto himself. We are fighting this war at a terrible cost. What is going on now in the way of tragedy is perhaps not the worst. The worst will come when with broken economic systems and broken bodies and broken hopes and broken hearts, we try to rebuild what we have destroyed. Yet this war is not going to be a complete loss. Already in this bleak desert we can detect the blooming of flowers that are going to make for a better world.

c) Then God reigns in that to those who co-operate with him, he changes every good into a greater good, and every loss into gain. This was Paul's amazing discovery: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." In these desperate days, his is a faith with which to gird our hearts. God does not propose to coddle us. He does not propose to shield us from the perils of living in a world like this. But if we enthrone him in our hearts, he can and will change every evil into good, every pain into a palm, every want into wealth. We are sure, therefore, that

God is reigning now. We are sure further that this reigning God shall not fail nor be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth.

2. We believe in the final victory of good because of the nature of sin. I can only touch on this. Sin is self-destructive. The Japanese, we are told, have a one-man submarine. It is capable of destroying a large vessel. But in doing so it destroys itself. Sin is like that. It carries an infernal bomb in its hands. The exploding of that bomb works its own destruction.

3. Finally, I believe in the ultimate victory of God because I believe in Jesus. That God should one day win a complete triumph was certainly the faith of our Lord. This conviction was the foundation of his entire ministry. It is especially indicated by the fact that when he taught us to pray he included this petition: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." How can we pray this prayer with expectancy and sincerity? We can do so only as we really believe in the final triumph of God and of goodness. Jesus certainly believed in that final triumph. He was far too stern a lover of fact to set us to seeking a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow when he knew that the nimble goddess of the mists would be gone before we could arrive, leaving us nothing but weary bodies, empty hands, and yet emptier hearts. He was sure of victory, sure that sin was already doomed. Sin was like a prisoner sentenced to death, waiting for the day of execution. "I beheld," he said joyfully,

"Satan as lightning fall from heaven." It is, then, this Supreme Realist who inspires and leads the glad shout, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." We believe, therefore, in the utlimate victory of God because he is reigning now, because of the nature of evil, and because of the faith of Jesus.

III

What is the good of such a faith? It is the source of unbounded joy and courage. It tells us that we are not fighting a losing fight. There is almost no limit to the courage of those who are sure of victory. The British have a saying that they can lose every battle except the last. How widespread this conviction is, and how firmly it is held, we do not know. But of this we can be sure—that if it is held by the people as a whole, to defeat them would be next to impossible. So it will be with ourselves as the saints of God if we sold fast to this high faith.

But if we give way to despair, if we lose heart and lose hope, then we shall count for little. Elijah was a great soul. But when he lost heart, the best that God could do with him was to use him to call a successor, and then take him to heaven. The trouble with him was that he got his eye so fixed on the passing scene that he lost his vision of the work of the Almighty and Ongoing God. As long as we hold this faith in ultimate victory, we can be strong in spite of present defeats. We can be superior to the passing scene.

Things are bad, I know; but even now, if we consult the centuries instead of the days, we can detect some progress. Because God lives and reigns, we can brace ourselves with the faith that

"From vict'ry unto vict'ry
His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished,
And Christ is Lord indeed."

But what of ourselves and of our present duty? The ultimate triumph may seem too far away and too vague to stimulate our courage, to excite our enthusiasm. Then what? See to it that Christ is King in your own heart. Open the windows of your soul toward the heavenly Jerusalem by praying this prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in my own heart." Enthrone him as King in your own soul. Then in spite of all that men or devils can do, you can shout, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." Better still, he will make you a basis of operation through which he will march toward the conquest of the ages.

XVI

COME, LORD JESUS

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

REVELATION 22:20

THIS BEAUTIFUL AND COMPREHENSIVE PRAYER IS A fitting climax to the amazing book that we have been studying. It is a fitting climax to the marvelous library that we call the Bible. It is a prayer that must strike a responsive chord in every truly Christian heart. Yet it is a prayer not only for every Christian, but for every human soul. Every man, I am convinced, prays it either consciously or unconsciously. This is the case because all of us have gnawing hungers and burning thirsts that can be satisfied only by the Bread of Life and the Water of Life. Therefore all mankind, either consciously or unconsciously, articulately or inarticulately, is praying this prayer: "Come, Lord Jesus."

I

What did this beautiful prayer mean upon the lips of the Seer of Patmos? What were the convictions that gave it birth?

1. It was born of a sore and desperate need. As we have reminded you before, John was in a trying situation. He was suffering in his own body. He was suffering in the tribulations and distresses of his fellow saints. Rome had unsheathed her sword and was bent on the destruction of the Church. John had despaired of victory through ordinary and orderly processes. Jesus had said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Through their witnessing, these saints had changed that hard Roman world. But now John felt that something more than such witnessing was needed if the Church was to be saved from utter extermination.

2. Not only was John praying in the consciousness of a great need, but he was praying in full assurance that his victorious Lord was able to meet that need. He was not only sure of his ability, but he was in a profound sense equally sure of his method. He believed that the Christ of the manger and of Calvary and of the Resurrection was going to come back visibly and bodily to lead his saints. He believed that, under the leadership of this Christ who is King of Kings and

Lord of Lords, Rome was to be destroyed and the Kingdom of God was to be made triumphant in the earth.

3. Not only did John believe that Jesus was coming back visibly and bodily so that every eye should see him, but he believed that he was going to return immediately. The little garrison called the Church was under heavy siege. It could not hold out long. Relief must come, if the situation was to be saved, not in some far-off tomorrow, but immediately. That, declared John, is the pledge of Jesus himself. "Behold, I come quickly." And when he had finished his book, he was forbidden to seal it as if to be held in reserve for some distant day. Its prophecies were to be fulfilled at once. John believed in the immediate, visible return of Jesus Christ.

In holding such faith, the Seer was in harmony with his fellow saints. It is beyond controversy that the apostles, that all the leaders of the Early Church, believed profoundly in the immediate and visible return of Jesus. This was emphatically the faith of Paul, the greatest intellect of that day. He had so grounded his converts at Thessalonica in this faith that, when some of them died, the survivors wrote him a letter, asking what effect the death of these Christians would have upon their participation in the glories of the Lord's return. They were afraid that those who had died before this great event would be cheated of its high privileges.

In his answer, Paul tells them that those who are alive at the coming of the Lord will have no advantage over those who have died. "The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Then he enjoins them to "comfort one another with these words."

His second letter to this church was occasioned by a too great enthusiasm on their part concerning the Lord's return. A letter purporting to be from Paul had told them that the Lord was absolutely at hand. Sure that the world was to come to an end at once, many of these saints ceased to work. They became pious loafers. Paul declares that instead of being busy they were mere busybodies. Refusing to work, they had to live off the charity of others. But practical Paul told them that unless they went to work they were not going to be allowed to eat. He did not force them to work. It was just work or starve. Then he told them of certain events that were to take place before the Lord would return.

But the fact that Paul had in this fashion to restrain the fanaticism of some of his converts does not mean that he did not rejoice in the hope of the immediate return of the Lord. He called this faith "that blessed hope." "The night is far spent," he wrote, "the day is at hand." It is only fair, however, to say that this faith does not seem to have had so

large a place in Paul's thinking during his later ministry. It is only fair to say further that the latest of the Gospels, the Fourth Gospel, makes little of this faith that was so prominent in the first days of the Church.

Since the early saints believed in the immediate and visible return of Jesus, it is not a matter of wonder that many earnest and devout men and women have held to this faith through the centuries. There are those who believe it joyfully today. There are whole sects to which it is fundamental. A dozen years ago there was a certain slogan that one of these sects spread over billboards, shouted over the radio, blazoned to the world in paid advertisements. It ran like this, "Millions now living will never die." It was a rather daring assertion, seeing that it could be so easily disproved. It is not to be wondered at that a leading laundry, which had more humor than reverence, adopted the slogan as its own, making it read in this fashion: "We do the dyeing for the millions now living."

The faith of those holding this view today roughly is this: They do not believe that it is the purpose of God to save the world in this dispensation. His purpose is that his saints bear witness so as to "take out . . . . a people for his name." This witness is to be increasingly ineffective. Instead of the world's growing better and better through the preaching of the Gospel and the work of the Church, it is to grow worse and worse. An able minister, who at one time

in my life was very helpful to me, and who has since gone to heaven, said during the first World War, "The blacker the picture becomes, the more my heart sings." He believed that the sooner things went from bad to worse, the sooner they became unbearable, the sooner the Lord would come to set up his Kingdom. Whatever optimism there is in this faith is certainly tinctured by the most ghastly pessimism. To hold such faith, it seems to me, is to misunderstand God's purpose for this age.

If it is not God's purpose to save the men of this age, it is hard to say just what purpose he has for them. It is evident from the reading of the New Testament that he expects that to be your purpose and mine. We are explicitly told to make disciples of all nations. If God expects that of you and me, it is hard to believe that he expects less of himself. Such a view, too, seems to indicate that God has a better way of saving the world than the one he is now employing. But this raises some difficult questions. For, if our Lord really does have a better way of saving the world than the one he is now employing, it is hard to understand why he does not use it. For me to do less than my best is sin. I agree with Whittier that

> "Nothing can be good in Him
> Which evil is in me."

But, be that as it may, these people believe that when

things get to their wicked worst, when the plan of redemption seems to have failed in large measure, then the Lord will suddenly make the heavens blaze with glory and establish his Kingdom. These, therefore, join in some fashion with John in praying this prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus."

II

What answer did Jesus give to this prayer that was offered with such earnestness by the Seer of Patmos and by his fellow believers? That they prayed for and expected the immediate, visible, bodily return of Jesus, I repeat, is beyond controversy. But there is another fact that is equally beyond controversy, and that is this —that Jesus did *not* come visibly, bodily, and immediately as they expected. That may sound shocking to some, but it is always profitable to face the facts. Here, then, are two facts beyond all dispute: John with his fellow saints believed in the immediate, visible return of Jesus; they prayed for it; but Jesus did not come in that fashion.

What, then, are we to conclude? That these saints were victims of wishful thinking? Are we to conclude that their Lord had misled them? Are we to question their inspiration? By no means. We know beyond a doubt that our Lord did answer their prayer, though he did not answer it in just the way they expected him to answer it. But it is the answer that is important; the method is secondary. When John prayed, "Come,

Lord Jesus," Jesus came into his heart. He came into the hearts of John's fellow believers. He so moved upon the Church that it was not destroyed as John feared it would be, but went from victory to victory. Jesus told his friends that that generation would not pass away before his coming. He told John, "I come quickly." He kept his word. He did not let them down. He never does.

But here, as often in the abundance of his wisdom and mercy, he answered better than his saints prayed. When Paul was suffering from some strange affliction that he calls a "thorn in the flesh," he was sure that he knew a way out of his difficulty. He would ask God to remove that source of pain and humiliation. Therefore, with eager assurance he besought the Lord that the "thorn" might depart from him. This he did three times over, and then, as another has said, he perhaps lost count. But God did not remove the thorn. Instead, he did something far better. He touched that thorn with the finger of his power and made it bloom into blossoms of rare beauty. Paul himself was more than satisfied with the results. He came, even to thank God for his thorn.

It was John's conviction that what he needed and what his world needed was a visible, bodily Christ. So many have that same conviction today! How helpful it would be, how unspeakably comforting in all our sorrows, if we had Christ in the flesh by our side!

There is a song that we used to sing. Many of us can join in it now.

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How he called little children as lambs to his fold,
I should like to have been with them then.

"I wish that his hands had been placed on my head,
That his arms had been thrown around me,
And that I might have seen his kind look when he said,
'Let the little ones come unto me.' "

That strikes a responsive chord in many of our hearts.

But ours is an even greater privilege than that. At least that was the conviction of Jesus. It had broken upon the dull minds of the disciples at last that their Master was going away. They were heartbroken as they looked toward the dull, gray days ahead. But Jesus sought to hearten them with these words: "It is expedient for you that I go away." "In going away," he was saying, "I am doing the best possible for you. As long as I am here in the flesh, I can be only with you. But when I return in the Spirit I can be both with you and within you." That a spiritual Christ can do far more than a physical Christ is evidenced by a look at the disciples themselves. They lived for three years with a visible, physical Christ, but with disappointing results. They selfishly quarreled over their own importance within the very shadow of the Cross. When

their Master was arrested, they did not stand by with high-hearted gallantry, but fled like frightened sheep. Till Jesus came in the Spirit, they were frail imitators of him, sharing little of his nature. But after that brief experience of Pentecost, they ceased merely to imitate him and began really to reproduce him. Jesus, therefore, did not answer the prayer of the saints by coming back visibly. He did something better. He came in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A second conclusion that we draw from this is that there is more than one coming of Jesus. He came again at his Resurrection. I think that is certainly what he meant when he said, "A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me." They failed to see him for the little while that he was in the grave, but after the Resurrection they saw him again. He certainly came at Pentecost. That is the event to which he was referring when he said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." Through the centuries he has come again and again, always in mercy where men were willing to receive him. But if they are not willing, in the very nature of things, he comes in judgment. This is not to deny a final coming when he shall judge the living and the dead. But it is an affirmation that he is coming constantly, immediately to all hearts that will give him welcome.

III

How, then, shall we pray this prayer? It is one that we dare not ignore. It holds in its hands at once high privileges and weighty responsibilities.

There are perhaps some of you who now pray it and will continue to pray it somewhat as the early saints prayed it. If such is the case, I have no quarrel with you. You are in great company. If you can believe that any day the heavens are likely to blaze with the glory of your returning Lord, then I would be the last to rob you of that joy. Such a faith has made for courage and high expectancy for countless thousands. Even if it be mistaken, it is far better than the most rational faith that leaves life dull and drab and unexpectant. I sympathize with Wordsworth as he sings:

> "Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn."

But I am thinking especially of those like me who cannot pray this prayer with the hourly expectation of the visible, bodily return of Jesus. Yet that fact need neither chill our hearts nor make dumb our lips. We can and ought to pray it as expectantly as did those early saints, for the Lord is at hand—he is eagerly waiting to get into your heart and mine; he is eagerly wait-

ing to get into every situation in our lives into which we are willing to give him welcome. We ought to pray this prayer earnestly. Christ is the answer to our personal needs. He is the answer for our homes. He is the answer for our Church. He is the answer for our world. Our Lord is always infinitely eager to come in mercy. He will come in mercy today if we will only prepare his way. Therefore, by your lips and by your life, pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," and you will find even now that you do not walk alone.

Finally, the praying of this prayer becomes all the more important when we realize that, if we do not permit Jesus to come in mercy, then he must come in judgment. Such was his coming when Jerusalem was destroyed. Listen to this heartbreaking cry: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, ... and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." Jerusalem had a day of opportunity. Jesus came in mercy, but he was rejected. Then he came in judgment. I believe in judgment to come because judgment is a fact of history. Our torn and tortured world is even now experiencing the judgment of God. If you dislike the

word, say that it is reaping the harvest of its own wrong sowing. But what I am affirming is that Christ is constantly coming, that he must come in judgment where we will not permit him to come in mercy.

"Come, Lord Jesus." Do we pray that prayer? Do we pray it expectantly? Remember that when Jesus was here he could do no mighty work in an atmosphere of unbelief. No more can he today. But one man who is sure can often save a whole situation. Years ago I was sent to a church that was torn to shreds by internal strife. I went there regretfully and with many misgivings. In fact, I dreaded it more than I have ever dreaded any appointment before or since. Things were so bad that I saw they must get better or we could not carry on at all. So I sent for a friend of whose power in prayer I had had intimate and personal experience. We set out together to have a revival.

For the first ten days the meeting went badly. I was finding it hard to keep up hope, but my friend's faith never wavered. Always there shone from his eyes a radiance born of certainty. On the tenth evening I went to the service to find the house crowded. My friend saw me as I came in and hurried to meet me. "Say what the Lord tells you to say tonight," he whispered in my ear. "Something is going to happen. The Lord is coming." I preached and made an appeal. Nobody moved. I then said, "Those who wish to retire may go. We are going to tarry here for a while." A very few left. Then we made another appeal. Then

something happened. That roomy prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus," was mightily answered. Explain it how you may, that church was remade and the whole community felt the inspiration of a new life. Because of the needs of your own soul, because of the needs of your own home and of your world, will you not with bowed head and heart join me in this prayer: "Come, Lord Jesus."